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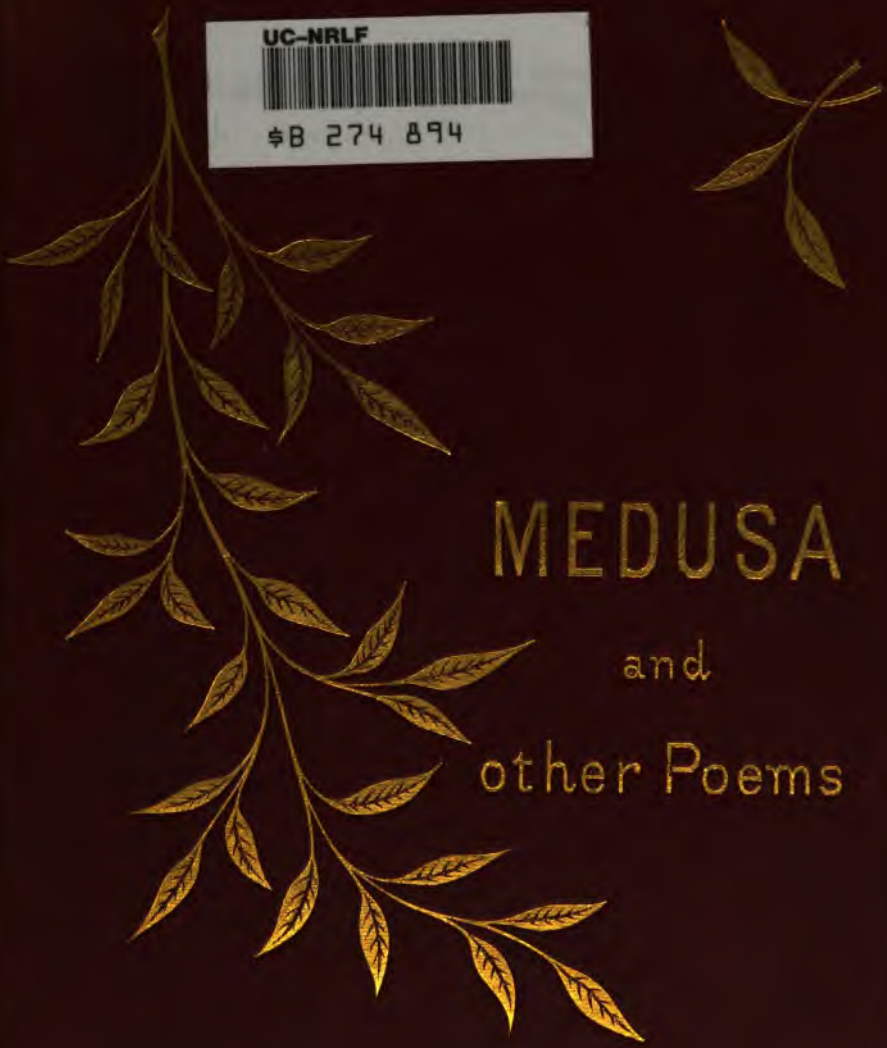

MEDUSA

and

other Poems

Lady Charlotte Elliot

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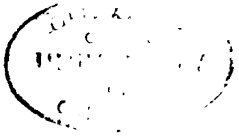
MEDUSA

AND OTHER POEMS.

BY

LADY CHARLOTTE ELLIOT.



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TO

MY HUSBAND

I DEDICATE THIS BOOK.

189216

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MEDUSA.

AFAR from the gates of the morning, 'mid shadows that
fade not nor flee,
Hung over by wind-riven mist-wreaths, and washed by
the westernmost sea,
Lies the desolate land of the gloaming, where day is no
other than night,
For the eye of the sun hath not seen it, nor knows it the
smile of the light
When the dawn shakes the dew from her tresses; but,
chilly and damp as the tomb,
The lurid, half-luminous vapours reveal the dread phan-
toms of gloom
Which wander and wail in its deserts, and lurk in its
fathomless caves,
And toss their wild arms in the twilight, and echo the
moan of the waves.

Therein dwell the daughters of Phorkys, the deathless and death-dealing forms
Who crouch in the rocky recesses, and slumber unseen, till the storms
Burst forth from their caverns of darkness; then, shrieking, they leap from their lair,
And shake out the serpentine tangles, the coils of their horrible hair,
And ride on the wrath of the tempest. Twain are they, but once they were three,
For Medusa, the youngest and fairest, the loved of the lord of the sea,
Was not as the others, but mortal; delight she had known, and despair,
And bore in her sorrowful bosom the burden that mortals must bear
Who grieve for a gladness departed, a joy that endured for a breath—
The burden of fear and of longing, the hope and the terror of Death.
Ah! once she was fair as the moonlight, that rests on the waters in love,
And white as the bell of a lily, and soft as the breast of a dove,

And mild were her eyes, and their glances were languid and subtle and sweet
When they shone thro' the shade of her tresses that hung, like a veil, to her feet;
But whoso looked long at her beauty grew cold in its perilous light,
For she knew the dark spells of aforetime, the secrets of silence and night,
And she learnt of the lore of immortals, and heard the discourse of a god,
When Poseidon, the lord of the ocean, came up from his sunless abode
And wooed her, 'mid beautiful meadows, where mosses were mingled with flowers,
While the moon in her splendour illumined the happy and love-laden hours.
But the joys of the night were as shadows when day brought its message of doom,
And the eyes of Athenè beheld her, and withered her delicate bloom;
And she shrank from the gaze of the goddess, and shook like a leaf in the gale,
For the power divine overwhelmed her; and nought could her fairness avail,

Nor her craft, nor the might of her magic, the daughter of
Zeus to withstand.
Sun-bright was the shield of Athenè, clear gold was the
spear in her hand,
And her eyes, like the light of the morning, searched out
all the secrets that lurk
In the dreary abysses of darkness, where glamour and
guile are at work
Swift-weaving night's subtle deceptions ; soft dreams that
delude and decoy,
False phantoms of horror that madden, fair visions that
lure to destroy.
In the gleam of her gaze stood Medusa, all pallid and
shrunk as a flower
That shrivels and pales in the sunshine. Her form
seemed to quiver and cower
From the crystalline eyes that subdued her with steadfast,
resistless control,
And clave the disguise of her beauty, and stripped her
all bare to the soul.
Then clear rose the voice of Athenè, and rang thro' the
vault of the sky :
" Be glad, O thou fair and false-hearted, that thou art of
those who can die,

Since death is the healer of sorrow, and thine shall be heavy and long;
For the wrath of the sacred immortals, the righteous avengers of wrong,
Shall cling like a curse to thy body, and hang like a stone at thy heart,
And mortals shall name thee with loathing, and know thee the thing that thou art.
No more shall the semblance of beauty lie soft as a luminous cloud
Around the dark spirit within thee, its secrets of guile to enshroud,
But thy form shall be fell as thy nature, thy face shall be scored, as a scroll,
With the record of thoughts that have wandered unknown in the night of thy soul.
Then woe be to those who come nigh thee; strange horror shall smite them, and hold
Their shuddering limbs and their bodies, till senseless, and rigid, and cold
They shall stand, and their forms that were fashioned of flesh shall be hardened to stone,
And thro' the long darkness of ages, dim cycles of seasons unknown,

Death-stricken and yet undecaying, aghast on the desolate plain,
A marvel to men, and a terror, the bodies they wore shall remain
Grey boulders of rock, that no summer shall crown with the glory of leaves :—
Lo, this is the curse of Athenè." Sharp-edged, as a weapon that cleaves
To the heart, were her words; and Medusa, like one who is wounded to death,
Stretched out her white arms to the heavens, and painfully laboured for breath
In the throes of her anguish. Then, slowly, the beauty died out of her face;
And the locks which hung low on her shoulders in silken and sinuous grace,
Rose up in a writhing confusion, and twined in strange coils, overspread
With streakings of sulphurous yellow, and rust-coloured patches of red
Like blood-drops grown dry, intermingled with luridly luminous flakes,
Green, livid and grey; and their tangles took form and were changed into snakes,

And a motion of life was among them; and one after one was upreared
Each horrible head fiery-crested, a venomous thing to be feared.
They encircled the neck of Medusa, and knotted their coils as a chain,
And basked in her soft chilly bosom, till, stung to a madness of pain,
She mingled her shrieks with their hissing, and fled, like a cloud on the blast,
O'er mountain and meadow and moorland, till morning and noontide were past,
And evening lay dim on the desert that borders the outermost land,
And the sun in the coolness of ocean was quenched, and the night was at hand;
Then she reached the wild region of darkness, the light-bereft land of the west,
And, spent with the speed of her flying, sank down by her sisters to rest.
So the seasonless years of her sorrow went past, and the days of her shame,
Till her fate was fulfilled, and far-flashing athwart the dim cloudland, there came

The sword, and the hand that could wield it, the heart
that could dare and prevail,
The righter of wrong, the avenger, the bringer of blessing
and bale.

From the sands of the isle of Seriphos, which blue-
gleaming waters enfold
With a shimmering pearl-studded girdle, came Perseus,
the child of the gold,
The child of the life-giving radiance that glowed on the
tremulous air,
When the love of the lord of Olympus descended on
Danaē fair.
O'er the foam of the perilous ocean, swift-flying came
Perseus, her son,
To the nameless abode of the Gorgons, where noonday
and night are as one,
That a deed he might do, and, undaunted, obey an
immortal behest;
For the power of the gods was upon him, the help of the
strongest and best.

He was borne on the wings of the sandals that Hermes had bound to his feet,
The sandals gold-feathered, ambrosial, as noiseless of flight, and as fleet,
As the glittering sunbeams that hasten adown the blue highway of heaven;
And over his breast was a buckler, the boon that Athenè had given,
Smooth-polished and clear as a mirror; therein he might gaze, and, unhurt,
Behold the wan face of Medusa. The weapon wherewith he was girt
Was forged by Hephaistos, and fashioned 'mid fires that for ever are fed
By the earth's mighty heart-throbs, upheaving the land, and the ocean's deep bed;
It was pointed, and curved like a sickle, and shone as the rainbows that play
Upon waters that laugh in the sunlight; and never it smote but to slay.
And he carried the helmet of Hades, wherewith, at his will, he might shroud
The beams of his beauty in darkness, and, dim as a wandering cloud,

Pass through the pale spectres of twilight, and speed on
the pathway of doom,
Unseen of the eyes of the serpents that glitter and glare
in the gloom.
And the spirit within him was god-like, for when, in his
boyhood, he strayed
Alone in the isle of Seriphos, he talked with the glorious
Maid,
And he learnt the deep lore of Athenè, and looked on
the light of her eyes,
And the breath of her beauty passed o'er him, and
brought him the strength of the wise.
Thro' the dun yellow twilight flew Perseus, light-poised
as a bird in the air,
But the helmet of darkness o'ershadowed his limbs and
the sheen of his hair,
As he sank to the earth like a vapour, and stood 'mid the
rocks on the strand.
Then the sound of a great lamentation rose up from that
dolorous land,
And the wail of a woman in anguish was wafted abroad on
the breeze,
And mixed with the moan of the surges that swell on those
sorrowful seas.

And the rocks of the wilderness echoed, now loud, and now broken and faint,
The voice of the woe of Medusa, the cry of her weary complaint.
"Ah, clear, cruel eyes of Athenè! ah, vengeful and pitiless heart!
Ah, the curse! ah, the stings of the serpents, that cease not to rankle and smart,
In my limbs, in my bosom! ah, torture! the horrors that circle my head
Have their life in the life of my body, and out of my heart they are fed!
Athenè! I mocked thee; I feared not to fling the wild words to the sky
That scoffed at thy strength and thy fairness, and lo! thou wert stronger than I,
And fairer, for thou art a goddess, and deathless; yet was not I fair—
Though dreamy and dark were the shadows that slept in the folds of my hair,
While ruddy as gold in the furnace thy locks floated forth to the light,
And thy cheek was a rose of the morning, while mine was a flower of the night,

A lily grown pale among shadows? But oh! the unbearable sheen
Of thine eyes; oh! those azure-grey glances, how calm was their gaze, and how keen
Was the searching and terrible splendour, which smote on my face, and displayed
Every fault, every flaw in its fairness, till, shrinking for shame, and afraid,
I bent to thy beauty, and owned thee more lovely and pure than the dawn!
Yet thy wrath was not stayed, nor, in pity, the weight of thy vengeance withdrawn,
When I bowed at thy feet and besought thee the bands of thy curse to undo,
Since thy years of delight are eternal, and mine must be fleeting and few.
Didst thou envy, oh! adamant-hearted, a bliss that thou never hast known,
The bliss that was mine, when, at midnight, I walked the dim meadows alone,
And Poseidon came up thro' the waters, and followed the track of my feet,
Yea, sought me, and followed and found me, and kind were his kisses and sweet?

Ah me, for my beauty departed ! I dreamed that it made
me divine,
And worthy to mate with immortals; and, mocking, I
entered thy shrine,
O Athenè, the pure, the unsullied, and stood in the
strength of my pride
By thine altar, and said to Poseidon ; Lo, now thou hast
made me thy bride,
And I fear not the wrath of Athenè. Then low laughed
the lord of the sea,
And he said, Fear her not, O Medusa, for thou art more
lovely than she,
And I love thee. But when in the heavens arose the
mild radiance of morn,
He stole from my side and forsook me, and left me alone
and forlorn.
Then thou camest, O queen, to thy temple, and there, like
a ghost from the tomb
That has strayed to the homes of the living, the land that
the sunbeams illume,
All quivering I crouched on the threshold ;—the heavens
cared not, nor the earth ;
The gods sat at ease in Olympus, and feasted and made
themselves mirth,

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And mortals were busy and mournful, and heavy with labour and care;
And none heard my cry, nor the curses that rang thro' each pause of my prayer;
None heard me, none helped, none avenged me; my heart is consumed in the flame
Of a wrath that avails not; and darkness has closed o'er my grief and my shame.
Yet fear my despair, O thou ruthless! lest vengeance be wrought for my wrongs
On the mortals thou lovest, who praise thee, and circle thine altar with songs,
Who bring thee fair garlands of olive, and pour thee libations of wine,
And weave thee the sun-coloured tissue to veil the inviolate shrine:
For whoso of these shall behold me must die of the death that I bear
In my eyes; yea, my anguish shall slay them, the chill of my stony despair,
And then shall the curse thou hast spoken go forth in the cry of their pain
And seek thee afar thro' the radiance that hides thee, and find thee again!

Vain boast! Who am I that would harm thee? Thou seëst what is and shall be,
And whom thou wilt save cannot perish, and whom thou wilt slay cannot flee.
In thy love, in thy hate, thou art strongest; I strove, and I sank in the strife;
The dreariness of death is my portion, and thine is the rapture of life;
Outworn is the might of my magic, the spells thou hast wrought shall endure;
More foul grows my face, and more fatal, as thine grows more lovely and pure;
I bow at thy feet; thou hast conquered; I yield; thou hast smitten me sore;
Yet smite once again, that my curses may trouble thy triumph no more;
O thou pitiless, smite me in pity, and so shall I bless thee at last,
And my shame shall depart as a shadow, my pain as a night that is past,
Like my life, like my love! I am weary—my eyelids are heavy with sleep;
But oh! for the slumber that ends not, the rest that is dreamless and deep."

More broken and weak grew her wailing, as sleep stole upon her, and dulled
The rage of her pangs, and more mildly she grieved, and her moaning was lulled
Like the voice of the wind when, aweary, he folds his wild wings for a space,
And sighingly sinks into silence. Then Perseus drew near to the place
Where slept the two Gorgons, the deathless; they crouched in a cleft of the rocks,
Their faces of horror were hidden, and still were their serpentine locks.
But, in the dull glare of the twilight, Medusa was dreaming alone;
Half-raised, half-reclining, she pillowed her curse-stricken head on a stone;
One bare, wasted arm spread its whiteness along the cold rock by her side,
The other lay over her bosom, whereon, like a necklace, were tied
The knots of the snakes, as they slumbered. But Perseus had raised up his shield,
And, turning away from her presence, he gazed on her image, revealed

In the mirror-like metal, and, scatheless, beheld the sad
daughter of doom.
Her face, with a terrible lustre, gleamed out 'mid the
sulphurous gloom,
All pallid with passions long-perished, and guilt that no
pardon may win.
Her cheek, by the channels of sorrow deep-hollowed, was
sunken and thin,
And livid as death was her forehead, all traced with
strange lines intercrost,
Like a delicate marble discoloured, and worn by the
rain and the frost;
Fast closed were her eyes, yet they quivered beneath the
large sweep of each lid,
As if in their darkened recesses some vision of horror lay
hid;
And the breath thro' her tremulous nostrils came pant-
ingly forth from her breast,
As it heaved when her heart-beats were hurried by fancies
of fear and unrest.
Her mouth was drawn downward with anguish, and dry
with the fever of pain,
Yet its sinuous outlines were lovely, a vision of beauty
and bane;

Her lips were pressed close as the petals a poppy enfolds
in its bud,
And their form seemed a magical symbol, a character
written in blood,
As if in its curves was a secret, a mystery no man might
know,
The mark of the sin of Medusa, the sign of unspeakable
woe.
Long, long in the mirror looked Perseus, till pity awoke
in his heart,
For the grief that no gladness shall follow, the sorrow
that shall not depart;
For the night that beholds not the morning, the darkness
that dies ere the day;
For the beauty and horror he looked on, the love-bereft
form he must slay;
And the strength of his sinews was slackened, his spirit
grew sluggish and chill,
As he gazed on the image of evil, and ever more weak
was his will
To work on that sorrowful sleeper the doom that the
gods had decreed,
For the spell of her presence was on him, and hindered
his hands from the deed.

Then, o'er the grey shades of the cloudland, a glimmer
of brightness was cast,
And, parting the pestilent vapours, a fragrance ambrosial
went past,
For the heavy and sulphurous stillness was stirred by an
air from on high,
And the spirit of Perseus awakened, and knew that
Athenè was nigh.
He heard not her voice, nor beheld her, but viewless she
stood by his side,
And the strength that had ebbed from his body came
back as the flow of the tide,
And his heart was filled full of the goddess, and faltered
no longer for ruth
When he looked on Medusa, remembering the love and
the grief of her youth.
Low moaned the wan sleeper and started, and murmured
as one that awakes,
And hissing uprose from her bosom the venomous heads
of the snakes,
And they fastened upon her in fury, and spat out their
poison abhorred.
Then Perseus drew forth from the scabbard the god-given
sickle-shaped sword,

And raised it aloft, and its radiance laughed out, as it rushed thro' the air,
And smote on the neck of Medusa, and ended her days of despair.
Then the folds of the mantle of Perseus fell dark on the face of the dead,
And he gathered its fringes together, and took up the terror-fraught head,
And slung the dread spoil on his shoulder, and lightly arose from the ground
On the wings of the sandals of Hermes. Then, out of the silence, a sound
Burst forth, and the caverns re-echoed a cry from the rock-girdled shore,
Like the shout of the rage of the storm-clouds that rise from their prison and roar,
As they dart out their death-bearing lightnings; and, swift as a bolt from the skies,
Forth rushed the avengers, the Gorgons. Red flared the fell fire in their eyes
As they stretched their vast pinions for flying, and rose in the strength of their wrath,
And pressed after Perseus, and followed his form on the shadowy path,

While he sped thro' the cloudland, and hastened to reach
the fair dwellings of day.
Hate-hungry, they hooked their fierce talons, and panted
and howled for their prey,
Their hands touched the hem of his garment, their
breath stirred the waves of his hair,
In his ear was the hiss of their serpents that quivered and
strained thro' the air;
But, before they could harm him or hold him, he crossed
their dark borders, and passed
From the mirk to the morning, and left them to shake
their dread locks in the blast,
And wail their wild woes to the ocean. But lightly he
sped on his way
Till a beautiful land lay before him, all bright with the
blossoms of May.
There, swift as a dream, he alighted; and lo, from the
ocean's dark bed
The sun, in the youth of his splendour, uplifted his
glorious head.

SONG TO THE SOUTH WIND.

BLOW, sweet south wind, and let me hear thy singing,
Bring me the music of the days of old;
Come, with warm vapours round thy pinions clinging,
All glorious with the glow of tropic gold.
Sing of the land of mango groves and palms,
Where strange, sweet fruits grow ripe for lips athirst,
Where wounded trees weep rare and fragrant balms,
And flowers like flame from bud to blossom burst;
Where all the days are dreams, and all the nights
Are full of soft delights.
Sing me the ancient tales of mystery
Told by the southern sea,
The endless tales of magic and of love,
Low-chanted to a drowsy, changeless tune,
Beneath the full-orbed moon,
And the large, lucid stars that westward move,

While the warm hours from eve to morn are winging;—
Blow, sweet south wind, and let me hear thy singing.

Sing, gentle wind, of lovely isles elysian,
  Green gardens, girdled by the peaceful waves,
Till o'er my slumb'rous fancy floats a vision
  Of white-armed Sirens in their secret caves.
Oh! bring me from that fair and fatal shore
  The maddening sweetness of those songs of doom
Which lured the listening sailor from his oar,
  And softly wooed him to a watery tomb!—
Then, let that dreamful melody of death
    Faint on thy fleeting breath,
And sing the nobler song that pealed afar,
    And woke the morning star,
When Orpheus stood upon the Argo's prow,
With floating locks of gold and eyes of fire,
    And struck his sacred lyre,
Until the vanquished Sirens wept for woe,
Their cruel hands in fruitless anguish wringing;—
Blow, sweet south wind, and let me hear thy singing.

Bear, thou soft wind, from fair Arcadian valleys
Great Pan's aërial music wildly sweet,
And echo from the flowery forest alleys
The joyous tripping of the wood-nymphs' feet.
Oh! let me catch the Mœnad's frenzied cry
As, whirling, thro' the mystic dance she speeds;
Or hear the prisoned soul of Syrinx sigh
Melodiously among the moving reeds;
Bring, bring the voices of those vanished dreams
Which filled the woods and streams,
The hill-tops and the fountains and the trees
With charmèd melodies,
When kindly forest fauns came forth to play
Upon their pastoral pipes at eventide,
By the cool riverside,
While from afar some listening Oread,
With lovely limbs unclad,
Stole from her grotto down the grassy way,
Where mountain myrtles round her steps were springing;—
Blow, sweet south wind, and let me hear thy singing.

Alas! sad wind, thy languid wings are weary,
They bear such music hitherward no more;

But woeful dirges from the woodlands dreary,
And moanings from the melancholy shore.
Sadly thou sing'st how heedless hands uproot
The vocal groves, and lop each sacred bough,
While the dull echo of some faithless foot
Disturbs the mountain's consecrated brow,
And all the fair divinities around
Fly, weeping, at the sound.
They weep, they fly, they hide their youthful grace
From our stern-hearted race;
We have no ears to hear their lovely song,
Made for the children of the world's young day,
For we are old and grey.
Blow, weary wind, the withered leaves along,
And the pale mists like shrouds about thee clinging;
Grieve me no longer with thy mournful singing.

THE SON OF METANEIRA.*

DEMETER, the giver of harvests, the mother of plenty and peace,
Who quickens the life in the seed-corn to ripeness and joyful increase,
Who sits in the light of Olympus, and 'mid the high gods had her birth,
Came down to the dwellings of mortals, and wandered alone on the earth.
The beams of her beauty were darkened, and crownless her head, for she bowed
Borne down by the burden of sorrow, enwrapped by despair as a cloud,
And she felt the deep pain of the mighty, and mourned with a measureless woe,
The hope-bereft, infinite anguish that none but immortals may know;

---

* It will be evident to many readers that a great part of this poem closely follows the Homeric Hymn to Demeter.

For the motherly heart in her bosom, left desolate, yearned unconsoled,
And her eyes, ever sleepless, searched aching for one whom they might not behold,
For the child of her love, at whose presence fled backwards the shadows of night,
Persephone, bringer of blossoms, Persephone, lady of light,
Whose beautiful feet on the meadows the flowers from their slumber awoke,
Till narcissus and crocus and iris like flames 'mid the grasses outbroke.
Alas! for the valleys deserted, alas! for the desolate glades;
Strong Hades, who rules in the darkness the underworld peopled with shades,
Beheld the bright maiden, and loved her, with love that was weighty with doom,
And swift were the wheels of his chariot to speed to the dwellings of gloom,
As with pitiless gladness he grasped her, and bore her, unwilling, away
From the joy of the spring and the sunshine, the radiant delights of the day.

So the heart of Demeter was heavy; forsaken and empty was left
Her life, and fierce anguish possessed her, the wrath of a mother bereft,
And, fasting, she wandered unwearied through deserts and populous lands,
Through vineyards and cities and orchards; a torch she upbore in her hands,
And her locks, in her speed, were blown backwards, and gleamed in the blaze of the fire.
At last, as black night after tempest, despair took the place of desire,
And silent and hopeless she journeyed, enshrouded in pitiful weeds;
Nor paused she to rest, till her footsteps fell soft on the flowery meads
Of fragrant Eleusis. Unclouded, the sun in the heavens rode high,
And she sat by a well at the wayside, and heard the cool water go by.
Then thither there came, in the noontide, the sisters, the beautiful four
Who were daughters of Keleos the mighty when sway in Eleusis he bore;

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They came to the clear-flowing water that sparkled and sang 'mid the grass,
And the sunlight shone warm on their garments, and gleamed on their pitchers of brass;
Their feet through the tender green meadows moved light as the feet of the fawn,
Their cheeks had the sweetness of spring-time, their eyes had the beauty of dawn.
They came to the well with their pitchers; an olive-tree grew by the way,
Its leaves made a screen o'er the water of silver and glimmering grey,
And lo! in its shade sat a woman, a wayfarer aged and poor,
Sore burdened with years and long labour, and sorrows that no man might cure.
Then spake the young maidens: "Oh! mother, what fortune hath led thee afar
From the sheltering roofs of the city, where men kind and pitiful are,
Who in their abodes would receive thee, and thou with the women shouldst dwell,
With the old and the young of the household in safety, and all should be well."

Thus spake the fair daughters of Keleos, and knew not
that she in whose eyes
Was the shadow of sorrow undying, who sat by the well in
the guise
Of a woman grown old in long service, was Queen of the
fruits of the field,
And the gifts and the gladness of harvest were hers to
refuse or to yield.
But such was the will of the goddess, and lowly she sat
in the shade,
And, hiding the truth from the maidens, she heard them,
and answer she made:
"Fair children, ye question me kindly, and that which ye
ask ye shall know;
But dark is the goal of my journey, and strange is the way
that I go;
For not of my choice came I hither, nor willingly crossed
I the sea,
But captive to pirates, and subtly I stole from their band,
and was free
While they feasted on shore in the evening: no profit
from me did they win.
But I know not the name of this country, nor know I the
dwellers therein,

And therefore I crave of your pity, sweet maidens, since gentle ye seem—
And all bountiful blessings of marriage that mothers for daughters can dream
Be yours from the gods—that ye tell me if any there be in this land
Who have need of the work of a woman, the help of a housewifely hand,
For well could I nurse a young infant, and tend him, and duly fulfil
The tasks of a household, and order the labours of womanly skill."
Then lovely Kallidice answered, of all the fair sisters most fair,
"Very great are thy griefs, yet, though mourning, the will of the gods we must bear,
And truly, O nurse, there are many brave leaders and counsellors wise
Whose wives would receive thee with gladness, and none would refuse or despise
Thy service; for smooth are thy sayings, and noble of aspect thou art.
But first let us ask of our mother, if thereto inclineth thy heart,

That thou mayst abide in our household, for there doth she nurture her boy,
And thou in thine arms shouldst enfold him, and carefully tend him, and joy
Should be hers in beholding his beauty and valour increase with his days;
Nor for this shouldst thou find us unthankful, but gifts should reward thee and praise,
For he is the loved of his mother, her boy, and her latest-born child."
Kallidice spoke, and, assenting, her sisters stood round her, and smiled.
Well pleased with their words was Demeter; she hearkened and said them not nay,
But arose and made ready to follow their steps on the wain-furrowed way.
Above their slim ankles they lifted their delicate robes, and their hair
Shone bright as the flower of the crocus, and sportively danced on the air,
While, lightsome as hinds in the spring-time, and joyous of spirit, they went
Through the beautiful fields of Eleusis, the valleys with blossoms besprent.

But sad were the steps of Demeter, and heavy and dark was the veil
Which covered her head, and o'ershadowed her face, by long pining made pale;
She was wrapt in the folds of her mantle, loose flowing and shapeless and dim,
Which hung o'er her feet and enshrouded the form of each glorious limb.
They reached the high dwelling of Keleos, and there, on the threshold, they saw
The house-mother, wise Metaneira; and wonder fell on her, and awe
Beholding Demeter, for truly her stature was godlike, and none
Could look on her eyes unrevering, such homage from mortals she won
Though shrouded in humble apparel, and bowed by the burden of pain.
With fear in her heart, Metaneira to welcome the stranger was fain,
And into the chamber she led her, and gave her the goodliest seat,
And filled a fair cup for her drinking with wine that was ruddy and sweet.

But speechless and still sat the goddess, and drank not
the heart-cheering wine,
For she brooded on grief unforgotten, nor ceased for her
lost one to pine.
Then spoke Metaneira, "I hail thee, O guest, who art
noble of birth,
For vainly thy coarse-woven raiment would hide thy
true greatness and worth;
But Fate hath pursued thee with sorrows, and who with
the gods may contend?
And now, to my house be thou welcome, as friend to the
house of a friend;
And nurse thou my boy, whom, unhoped for, the gods in
my bosom have laid,
And e'en as his growth shall thy guerdon increase and thy
care be repaid,
And thou shalt be glad of his glory, and joy in his pros-
perous years,
For deep in my heart is he cherished, the child I have
longed for with tears."
Then Demeter made answer: "My greeting O wife of
great Keleos, to thee
I give; may much good be thy portion, and graced by
the gods mayst thou be.

Now gladly thy boy will I nurture, and lull him to sleep
on my arm,
Nor fear thou the might of false magic, nor dream of the
dark-woven charm,
The evil that stealeth in secret to slay the sweet blossom
unblown;
For not unregardful of danger am I, nor to me are
unknown
The word and the sign that have power, the mightier
magic to quell
The force of each evil endeavour, and baffle each bale-
bearing spell."
Thus spoke great Demeter, and, yearning, she stretched
forth her arms for the child,
And lo! as he lay in her bosom, the storm of her sorrow
grew mild.

Now fair was the babe that to Keleos his wife Metaneira
had borne,
And strong were his limbs and his body, and white as the
flower of the thorn,
And day after day with his beauty the heart of his mother
was blest,

As he smiled on the knees of Demeter, or slept in the warmth of her breast.
No food of the earth did she give him, nor milk of the goat or the ewe,
But like to a child of immortals she reared him, and god-like he grew,
Nor for anger or terror or hunger he wept, but was happy and calm,
For the touch of her hands gave him comfort, the kiss of her lips was as balm,
And lovely and dreadful and glorious shone o'er him the light of her eyes,
As a purpose took shape in her spirit, by heavenly wisdom made wise.

Night lay on the dwelling of Keleos, a night that was moonless and deep;
The men and the maids and the matrons were bound in the meshes of sleep.
Then up rose the nurse with her nursling, Demeter arose from her bed,
And, clasping the babe to her bosom, amid the still darkness she sped

To the banqueting hall of the palace, and there, like an eye in the dark,
There gleamed on the hearth 'mid the ashes a ruddy and vigilant spark.
Fresh fuel she cast on the embers, the life that was in them she fanned,
Till high leapt the blaze in its fervour, and fed on the heart of the brand;
Then low by the side of the hearthstone she sat with the babe on her knee,
And he watched the gay sparks dancing upwards, and pointed and laughed in his glee.
Then swiftly she loosened his garments, and bared his sweet limbs to the light;
And soft as a flower was his body, and fair as a star in the night,
Amid the dim shadowy chamber, high-vaulted and empty and vast,
It shone, rosy red with the radiance that over its whiteness was cast.
With tender and motherly touches the hands of the goddess fell soft
On his form, and an exquisite fragrance breathed round him, and floated aloft

Thro' the chill midnight air, as she chafed him, and soothed him with slow-moving palm
Made moist with the mystic ambrosia, the sacred and life-giving balm.
And she sang; to her hands' even motion her voice in low music kept time,
And her song was the world's ancient secret of love and of life in its prime,
E'en the song of the earth and the heavens, which no man hath heard or may hear,
When they meet and rejoice in the season that crowns the long hopes of the year;
It was like the warm wind in the autumn astir in the leaves of the trees,
Or the deep multitudinous murmur that swells from the soul of the seas,
Or the sound of the corn when at noontide it warms into ripeness and grows,
Or the voice of a beautiful garden when sun-cherished blossoms unclose.
Still singing she rose, and bent over the brands on the hearth as they blazed
Glowing red; and the babe from her bosom she took in her hands, and upraised

O'er the crests of the flames which curled round him, and clasped him with cruel desire,
And she gave them her nursling, and plunged him, all naked and white, in the fire.
There, flushed as a cloudlet at sunrise, vermilion and lovely he lay
In the midst of the brands, and around him the bright fiery tongues were at play.
And they kissed his fair cheek and his forehead, his head as with sun-rays they fringed;
Yet his delicate flesh was unshrivelled, his glittering locks were unsinged,
And he smiled in his terrible cradle, and feared not the withering breath
That blew on his form, which lay pillowed alive on the bosom of Death.

Alas! for the love without knowledge, the mother-love foolish and blind,
That thwarts the high purpose of Heaven, and, strong in its weakness, would bind
A soul that the gods have unfettered and winged for the perilous flight

To regions divine, where, god-guided, unscathed it may gaze on the light !
In haste from her shadowy chamber came forth Metaneira, aroused
By a fear without name for her infant, a fear lest the stranger she housed
As a guest highly favoured, the woman mysterious of look and of word,
Should wrong him by arts of false magic; for 'mid the night-silence she heard
The voice of Demeter, and followed the sound thro' the darkness, and lo !
She saw, as she stood on the threshold—ah, vision of horror and woe !—
The blaze of the terrible furnace, the babe in the midst of the brands.
She shrieked, in the madness of terror, with raving and wringing of hands :
"Oh ! child of my heart; oh ! unhappy; by murderous hands thou art nursed;
Thou art slain by the craft of the stranger, the wiles of the woman accursed;
Woe, woe for the good turned to evil, the gift that was given in scorn;

Oh! my babe that so early must perish, I would thou
hadst never been born."
But over the flames bent Demeter, and, plunging her
hands in their heat,
She plucked forth the child from the embers, and laid
him unhurt at her feet.
Then swiftly uprising, she loosened her mantle and cast
back her hood,
As clouds from the sun they fell from her, and in the
dim chamber she stood,
Unveiled in her splendour immortal, divinely majestic in
size.
Far flashed, like the blue summer lightning, her wrathful
and beautiful eyes,
And her hair floated free on her shoulders, and filled
all the dwelling with light,
And her garments breathed odours elysian; and strong
as a god in his might,
Yet more fair than the fairest of women she seemed; as,
with spirit afraid,
Low bent Metaneira before her, and trembled. "Vain
mortals," she said,
And her voice was divine in its anger—"Vain mortals,
who see not the end,

Be it evil or good, yet endeavour the work of the gods to amend
With the haste of the feeble and faithless, and mar what ye cannot renew,
Too late must ye weep your unwisdom 'mid ills that no tears may undo!
Yea, weep for thy son, Metaneira, that sickness must seize him, and age,
And the shadow of death hover o'er him, and ills that thou canst not assuage
Devour the ripe strength of his manhood; yea, weep for the deed of to-night,
For the cowardly heart unbelieving, the weakness made rash by affright.
For I am Demeter, the mother of seasons, the giver of joy,
And lo! for the love that I bore him, a boon I prepared for thy boy,
And his weak human frame I refashioned, to share in the nature divine
Which knoweth not death, neither sickness, nor pallid decay, nor shall pine
In the languor of age, but, immortal, renew its fresh youth as the sun;—

But the voice of thy fear snapt asunder the spell that was wisely begun.
And now must the doom come upon him; the curse of the sons of the earth;
As a blight in the bud, deeply hidden, lurked Death in his frame at his birth,
And e'en in the might of his manhood, the noon of his glorious day,
Unfelt, he must bear in his body the sure-growing seeds of decay,
He must fail, he must fade, and for beauty unsightliness, weakness for strength,
Must be his in the years that come after; till weary of living, at length
He shall love what he loathed, and with longing prepare to lie down in the grave,
For thy fear plucked him forth from the furnace, the Heav'n-kindled fire that could save.
And ever his eyes shall reproach thee as sorrow grows round him, and strife,
And the evils that mortals must suffer oppress and embitter his life,
As the lessening years stretch before him, and he to his end hastens on,

He shall mourn for the deed uncompleted, the gift and the glory foregone !
Yet great shall he be among mortals, and praised 'mid the bravest and best,
Because on my knees he hath slumbered, and loved me, and lain in my breast."
All night wept the babe, though his sisters had lifted him up from the ground,
And one clasped him close, and the others, light-footed, were hovering around
To soothe him with gentle caresses, and tend him with sisterly care ;
Yet vainly they strove to console him, the heart of the babe was aware
That the hands which now held him were mortal, and, wailing, he longed for the face
And the comforting touch of Demeter, the warmth of her hallowed embrace.
And as years passed away, and the goddess rejoiced with her daughter, restored
To her motherly breast, and the temple where darkly her name was adored
Shone fair on the heights at Eleusis, the boy she had nursed on her knee

Was haunted by things half-remembered, like dreams
when the night-shadows flee,
And oft in his youth and his manhood, in glad and in
sorrowful years,
The mystical song of Demeter ran soothingly sweet in his
ears,
And her breath stirred the hair on his forehead, and
strangely his spirit was filled
With a dimly mysterious remembrance, a yearning that
could not be stilled.
For those whom the gods in their cradles have visited,
mingling their dreams
With murmurs of marvellous music, and glimpses of
beauty, and gleams
Of glories untold; when youth passes, and noon follows
fast on the dawn,
Still remember, forget, and remember, and sigh for the
vision withdrawn,
And they stretch out their hands in the darkness, and
listen and look for a sign
From the closed doors of Heav'n, to betoken a power and
a presence divine.

A CALM DAY BY THE RIVER.

WHAT murmurs of a waking dream
Are in thy voice, mysterious stream?
Learnest thou from thy natal rills
The ancient secrets of the hills?
Or dost thou hear the far-off roar
Which woos thee from thy sheltering shore,
And art thou yearning for the sea
Whose mingled waters call to thee?

Ah, love! what matters this to us
Who rest beside the river thus,
And hear, while wave on wave departs,
The love-beats of each others' hearts?
Nay, ask not whither, ask not why,
The full, fair stream flows swiftly by,

But lie and watch the lovely scene
As if no past had ever been,
Nor any future should destroy
The continuity of joy.
Here heavy-foliaged boughs are bent
To breathe the water's faint, fresh scent,
And taste, like us, the fleeting bliss
Exhaled by such an hour as this.
Here languid water-lilies lie
Snow-pale beneath the glowing sky,
While, Danae-like, their bosoms hold
A splendid shower of amorous gold.
Warm breezes, trembling down the tide,
The feathery fronds of ferns divide,
And bless us with their breath, which yields
The fragrance of the summer fields—
Soft breath, where mingled memories meet
Of clover, and mild meadow-sweet.

Lie still, beloved; in such an hour
We live the life of fern and flower,
Forgetting all that underlies
The subtle smile in Nature's eyes,

The woes, the sins that shame the sun,
The mournful wisdom slowly won
As year by year the brown leaves fall,
And youth slips past;—forgetting all
Save only that the world is bright,
And love envelops us like light.
The whispers of our joy alone
Disturb the water's monotone,
The soft, swift rush of silver sound
Wherein sad fantasies are drowned.
Lulled by that music, watch the dream
That hovers o'er the slumbering stream.
What exquisite illusions lie
Amid its ripples—sapphire sky
And golden foliage! need we know
The secrets of the soil below,
Or strive to find the chilly bed
Where last year's ferns and flowers lie dead?
Nay; souls grow faint with brooding still
On mysteries of death and ill,
Stirring, 'mid vapours poison-rife,
The turbid sediment of life.
On this sweet day, by this clear stream,
Believe that things are as they seem;

Adore the fairer face of truth.
The rapture of immortal youth
Lives on, though lovely forms decay,
In new-born beauty day by day.
Rejoice! rejoice! love doth not die,
There is no death! Behold the sky
Shine glorious in the stream, behold
The purple shadows flecked with gold;
Watch the swift dragon-flies at play—
Bright jewels, which the summer day
Strews o'er her raiment; see yon stone
With curious lichens overgrown,
Scarlet and ash and yellow; trace
The silvery ripples round its base,
Which slowly seek the restful pool
Beneath the bank, where, damp and cool,
Hang hidden tufts of maiden-hair;
Or watch the mild, voluptuous air
Drop idly on the water's breast
A leaflet severed from the rest,
Or leave among the tangled weed
A fluttering plume of snowy seed.

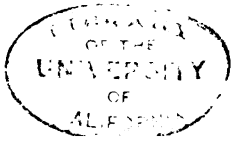
O lovely stream ! O lovely shore !
As fair as in old years, before
We looked upon you, so, in days
When we can neither see nor praise,
The living light of summer hours
Shall rest upon your new-born flowers ;
Unchanged, the splendour of the sky
Shall still within your bosom lie ;
For love, in youth perpetual, reigns
O'er each glad pulse of nature's veins,
And all the tears of human woe
Can never quench its deathless glow,
Nor all the ills that men have done
Dim the clear shining of the sun.

CAPTIVES.

WHY doth the caged bird sing
In the dull city, where the gloomy hours
No gleam of sunshine bring?
How can he feel the rapture of the spring
So far from all its flowers?

Though he be captive-born,
Yet his free spirit seeks the forest glade,
And in his home forlorn
He trills, as if he saw the tender morn
Smile through the young leaves' shade.

A mate he never knew,
Yet hath he learnt the very note of love,
And softly seems to woo,
As if his gentle bride before him flew
To nestle in the grove.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We too, imprisoned souls,
Can sing of lovely lands that none have seen
Or sought betwixt the poles,
Round whose fair shores a magic ocean rolls
Its waves of sapphire sheen.

And yet we know not whence
Comes the dream-light that warms that visioned earth
To beauty more intense ;—
Unless from some sweet realm unknown to sense,
Wherein we had our birth.

And there we learnt of yore,
Perchance, to pine for love that cannot die,
Untold in human lore ;
Oh ! shall we find our by-gone bliss once more,
Or only sing and sigh ?

THE PYTHONESS.

"BIND up her loose hair in the fillet, and wipe the cold
dew from her cheek,
For the force of the spirit has left her outwearied, and
nerveless, and weak."
So murmured the pitying maidens, and soothed me, and
laid me to rest,
And lightly the leopard-skin mantle drew over my shiver-
ing breast;
Then bent their warm faces to kiss me, with tenderness
mingled with awe,
Revering the god in his priestess, whose word is obeyed
as a law
By the tyrant, the terror of nations. A word from my
lips, and the land
Shall have rest, and the weapon uplifted shall fall from
the threatening hand;

Though gifts may be heaped on the altar, rich goblet and
gold-embossed shield,
The gods give no promise of favour, and keep what they
will unrevealed.
Shall I glory in this, that decreeing the close or beginning
of strife,
I, who speak what I know not, am chosen controller of
death and of life?
Nay; I, who was voiceless, am fated to be as a flute
which is blown
By the powerful breath of immortals, to music which is
not its own:
Soon, soon, strained to tones superhuman, unfitted for
use or delight,
The tremulous flute will lie shattered, cast out from
remembrance and sight.
My maidens have left me to slumber; but tears scorch
my eyelids instead—
Tears, bitter with passionate envy of those either living
or dead;
Not as I, who exist in illusion, with body and soul rent
apart,
Possessed by a terrible spirit, pierced through by a fiery
dart,

Caught up by a whirlwind, tormented with light too
intense for my brain,
Till the vision is past, and I waken remembering nought
but the pain.
O mighty and cruel Apollo, thy gift is despair and the
grave!
My life, like a wreck on the ocean, is tossed to and fro
by the wave.

O fair, pleasant home of my childhood!—dear valley,
thy shadows are cool;
All pale in the languor of noontide the lily bends over
the pool,
The laurel and cistus are fettered by tangles of blossom-
ing weeds,
The rose leans her cheek to the ivy, the asphodel shines
through the reeds;
Wild bees, with low rapturous murmurs, drink deep at the
hyacinth's heart,
And over the mystical lotus bright legions of dragon-flies
dart.
And there dwelt my woodland companions, my tender-
voiced soft-breasted dove,

Which perched on my shoulder, with flutterings and murmurs of pleasure and love;
And my gentle white fawn, the fleet-footed, whose breath was so wondrously sweet,
For he fed upon rose-leaves, and ever he lay on the moss at my feet,
And his wild, wistful eyes shone like jewels, as if he delighted to hear
The dream-woven songs which I fashioned and sang when no other was near.

I pine for the breeze of the forest, I thirst for the spring cold as ice,
Instead of these fumes of rich incense, this draught mixed with dream-giving spice;
I long for my infancy's slumber, untroubled by phantoms of dread;
I long for cool dews of the morning, to drop on my fever-hot head;
I long—how I long—to be cradled once more in the valley's soft breast,
And, lulled by my childhood's lost music, to sink like a babe into rest.

The day died in flames on the mountains, and stealthily, hiding the skies
With a film of thick-gathering darkness, night fell on the earth by surprise;
But flashes of wild summer lightning played over the tops of the pines,
And glanced on the streams—which meandered in slender and silvery lines,
'Mid alder, and willow, and hazel—and shone in my face, as I fled
Alone through the depths of the forest, all panting and trembling with dread.
Astray in the darkness, I threaded the briery paths of the wood,
Then burst through the thicket. Before me, terrific and glorious, stood—
Oh horror! the oak of Apollo—the haunted, the fearful, the vast;
Whose roots search the earth's deep foundations, whose limbs are as steel in the blast:
Pale visions that may not be uttered, dwell under its branches at night,
And strike the beholder with madness, and wither his limbs and his sight.

The hand of the god was upon me, the power that is mighty to form
My life at his will, as the cloud-wreaths are shaped by the power of the storm;
And my heart fainted in me for terror, since nowhere unmarked could I flee
From the doom that pursued me. Then, dimly, I saw in the shade of the tree
The priest of the temple; and onward he came, and drew near, and his gaze
Sought me out and subdued and enthralled me, and pierced me with glittering rays,
Which drew forth my soul from my body, with force that I could not resist,
Then grew into flames, and enwound me in meshes of fiery mist;
My eyelids drooped under the pressure, a shock of unbearable pain
Thrilled through me, as keen as a sword-thrust; then darkness fell over my brain.

Great Delphi! in desolate grandeur thy cliffs stand all bare to the sky,
As barren of beauty and freshness, as lonely and mournful as I.
The scream of the wandering eagle rings over thy echoing rocks;
The vultures flock hitherward, scenting the flesh of the sacrificed ox;
But the murmurous voice of the woodland shall never more breathe in my ear,
Nor Philomel's passionate music melt stones into tenderness here;
My soul has resigned its communion with all that it cherished and loved;
From dreams of a happier future, for ever and ever removed.
No love-lay shall thrill with my praises the balmy and sensitive air,
No hand shall twine garlands of jasmine to star the deep night of my hair,
No eye shall grow soft at my presence, nor watch me with rapturous glance,
Amid the bright circle of maidens move swift through the rhythmical dance,—

No bridegroom shall woo me, no taper of marriage be lighted for me,
No children with flower-like faces shall smile away care at my knee.

But surely the night will bring slumber, and surely the grave will bring rest,
And my spirit be lapped in Elysium in balm-breathing isles of the blest;
And as summer, and sunshine, and beauty are born of the elements' strife,
My life, which brought death, be transmuted at last into death which brings life.
For luminous visions surround me, and exquisite forms hover near,
Caress me with soft spirit-touches, and murmur strange words in my ear:
Through air which seems empty to others, bright spirit-shapes cluster and throng:—
Already I mix with their essence, already I join in their song.

THE WIFE OF LOKI.

CURSED by the gods and crowned with shame,
Fell father of a direful brood,
Whose crimes have filled the heaven with flame
And drenched the earth with blood,

Loki, the guileful Loki, stands
Within a rocky mountain-gorge;
Chains gird his body, feet, and hands,
Wrought in no mortal forge.

Coiled on the rock, a mighty snake
Above him, day and night, is hung,
With dull, malignant eyes awake,
And poison-dropping tongue.

Drop follows drop in ceaseless flow,
  Each falling where the other fell,
To lay upon his blistered brow
  The liquid fire of hell.

But lo, beside the howling wretch
  A woman stands, devoid of dread;
And one pale arm is seen to stretch
  Above his tortured head.

All through the day is lifted up,
  And all the weary night-time through,
One patient hand that holds a cup
  To catch the poison-dew.

Sometimes the venom overfills
  The cup, and she must pour it forth;
With Loki's curses then the hills
  Are rent from south to north.

But she, in answer, only sighs,
  And lays her lips upon his face,
And, with love's anguish in her eyes,
  Resumes her constant place.

LOCH MAREE.

THE heather, oh! the heather!
How fair is the bloom of the beautiful heather
That reddens the hills in the August weather,
Far, far away from here;
Where the clouds are like fairy fleeces, spun
From golden rays of the setting sun,
And mists lie light on the mountain-side,
Like garments of gauze in a rainbow dyed,
And the evening glow shines clear
In the crystal waters quiet and cool
That are set in the depths of each rock-girt pool
Like diamonds fair to see;
And, bright as the glorious floor of Heaven,
The floor of the city with jewels paven,
Lies lovely Loch Maree!

The heather, oh! the heather!
Long years ago, 'mid the blooming heather
My brother and sisters and I together
Were happy all the day;
With bonnetless heads and with shoeless feet,
We sought the ripe blaeberries sourly sweet,
Or splashed in the burn, or waded across,
Or twined the long trails of the stag's-horn moss,
Till, tired of quiet play,
We ran down the hill in a merry race,
My brother Hugh and my sister Grace
And I, and Kate my twin;
And when evening fell, by the loch's dim shore
We watched for the sound of the splashing oar
When father's boat came in.

The heather, oh! the heather!
Far, far from the sight of the blooming heather
I was borne away, like a wind-blown feather,
To the dark and dreary town;
For sickness and woe to our home came nigh,
And Katie and Grace in the kirkyard lie,
And my father went out with my brother Hugh
On the stormy loch when the fierce winds blew,

And we saw them sink and drown;
So now I must work for my mother and me,
And the fatherless baby that lies on her knee,
And I sew, and sew, and sew,
Till my breath comes short with the pain at my heart,
And my fingers are sore, and my eyelids smart
With tears that dare not flow.

The heather, oh! the heather!
I dreamed a dream of the blooming heather;
It came in the night, but I know not whether
I was indeed asleep.
Methought that my body upon my bed
Lay quiet and chilly and white and dead,
But three fair angels were bearing me
Far over the land, far over the sea,
Far over the mountains steep;
The clouds flew past us, fleecy and fleet,
And oh! the wild wind from the hills was sweet
Through swaying fir-tops driven.
"Oh! tell me," I said, "to what land we go;"
And the angels made answer in murmurs low,
"We bear your soul to Heaven."

The heather, oh! the heather!
The sun shone warm on the blooming heather,
And the glittering rocks in the golden weather
Strange glories seemed to win;
For the angels had laid me down to rest
'Mid the fragrant firs on the mountain's breast,
And I knew, as I looked on each shining face,
My brother Hugh, and my sister Grace,
And little Kate, my twin;
And they kissed my brow with a gentle kiss,
And I, in my dream, was a soul in bliss,
Beside the crystal sea;
For there, like the glorious floor of Heaven,
The floor of the city with jewels paven,
Lay lovely Loch Maree!

The heather, oh! the heather!
All pale grew the light on the blooming heather,
And I saw the dull mists of the city gather
Around me, as I woke;
And I heard, through the silence, the heavy chime
From the steeple, to warn me of working-time.
On my mother's bosom her baby slept,
I kissed them softly, and forth I crept
To toil 'mid gloom and smoke:

But all day long, at my weary task,
In the sweet dream-sunshine I seemed to bask,
My heart felt light and free;
The loved lost voices were in my ear,
And the eyes of my soul saw, bright and clear,
My lovely Loch Maree.

A WINTER SONG.

Alas! cold earth, dost thou forget
The scent of April's violet?
Do wailing winds bemoan the death
Of youth and joy and odorous breath?
Are all these shrivelled leaves that fall
Heaped up for beauty's burial?—

Ah! no, no, no. The careful year
Prepares a bed, and not a bier;
Though beauty's trance be long and deep,
Her heart still quivers in her sleep;—
Then leave her place of slumber bare,
Let the loved sunlight enter there.

Alas! cold heart, hast thou foregone
The bliss that o'er thy spring-time shone?

Has all the winter of thy woe
Congealed thy weeping into snow,
And in that long and bitter frost
Has the sweet life of love been lost?—

Ah! no, no, no. Love wakes again,
Though faint and pale it long hath lain
And chilly was its place of rest;—
Then warm it, dearest, on thy breast,
Revive it with thy voice divine—
It wakens to no touch but thine!

DREAMS AND WAKING.

OFT in my slumber have I seemed to rove
Through the dim mazes of a magic grove,
Where, faint and light, the leafy shadows lay
Upon the tender grasses, fair and fine,
Of long green alleys, stretching far away;
And there, between the twilight and the day,
I saw a face of heavenly beauty shine;—
And ever, in my dream, the face was thine.

Oft in my slumber have I seemed to sail
On waters trembling in the moonbeams pale,
And listen to the music of the night;
The sobbing waves, the winds that gently pine
Round dusky creeks and glimmering headlands white.
Then, suddenly, I heard, with strange delight,
The far-off singing of a voice divine;—
And ever, in my dream, the voice was thine.

I dream no more, but in a garden fair,
Waking, I breathe the mild and balmy air;
And there, amid a bower of greenery,
Where honeysuckle clasps the eglantine,
The dear dream-face so long desired I see,
I hear the sweet dream-voice that sang to me
Soft words with softer melodies combine;—
Thine is the face, the lovely voice is thine.

A FAREWELL.

WHEN darkness hides me, dearest,
And when this face, now daily in thy sight,
Becomes a dream to haunt the silent night,
And vanish when the busy noon is clearest;

Then, dear, the love I gave thee,
Which ever for thy coming lay in wait,
Exacting often and importunate,
Shall be a memory to bless and save thee.

Some little foolish saying
Will wander back unto thee from the past,
Like a stray rose-branch o'er thy pathway cast,
With flowers and thorns thy careless steps waylaying.

June roses in December!—
Dream-roses, yet their phantom thorns give pain.
Somewhere, somehow, when we two meet again,
How much must we forget, how much remember!

A DREAM OF LONG AGO.

In the silence of the night,
  While I slept, my heart awoke,
And a face long lost to sight
  Like a star the darkness broke;
Then I felt her love enfold me
  In the bliss I used to know,
When her eyes and lips consoled me
  With the smile of long ago.

As her gaze grew more intense
  All the past was mine once more,
Calling back to soul and sense
  Love's so long forgotten lore;
Vanished memories came thronging
  Warm and sweet as youth's first glow,
Till my life dissolved in longing
  For the kiss of long ago.

But I sighed and strove in vain,
For her face grew far away,
And I wakened in my pain
To the cold unhappy day;
Then I rose like one still dreaming,
Weary with a weight of woe,
Through my heavy eyelids streaming
Flowed the tears of long ago.

REST IN THE GRAVE.

REST in the grave!—but rest is for the weary,
  And her slight limbs were hardly girt for toil;
Rest is for lives worn out, deserted, dreary,
  Which have no sweetness left for death to spoil.

We yearn for death when power and passion wasted
  Have left to memory nothing but regret;—
She sleeps, while life's best pleasures, all untasted,
  Had scarce approached her rosy lips as yet.

Her childlike eyes still lacked the crowning sweetness,
  Her form was ripening to more perfect grace;—
She died, with the pathetic incompleteness
  Of beauty's promise on her pallid face.

What undeveloped gifts, what powers untested,
  Perchance with her have passed away from earth;
What germs of thought in that young brain arrested
  Shall never grow and quicken and have birth.

She never loved, who might have loved so truly,
Though love-dreams stirred her fancy, faint and fleet;
Her soul's ethereal wings were budding newly,
Her woman's heart had scarce begun to beat.

We drank the sweets of life, we drink the bitter,
And death to us would almost seem a boon;—
But why to her, for whom glad life were fitter,
Should darkness come ere day had reached its noon?

No answer;—save the echo of our weeping,
Which from the woodland and the moor is heard,
Where, in the spring-time, ruthless storm-winds sweeping
Have slain the unblown flower and new-fledged bird.

A WITHERED ROSEBUD.

In the early spring, when blossoms were rare,
There grew in my garden a rosebud fair,
And I loved it and blessed it for blooming there.

The wild north wind came over the snows
And pierced the heart of my opening rose,
And the life within it shrivelled and froze.

Yellow and withered and dead it lay.
The north wind whistled and went his way,
The sun shone out and the earth was gay.

Now all the roses of summer are here,
Fragrant and lovely—but none so dear
As my rosebud that died in the dawning year.

THE BURDEN OF THE WIND.

O WIND, fresh wind of spring-time!
What hast thou borne away?—
A burden of light-winged moments
Too tenderly bright to stay;—
The music of children's laughter
From meadows all dewy and sweet,
Where primrose-buds and cowslips
Are trodden by joyous feet.

O wind, soft wind of summer!
What hast thou borne away?—
A burden of love and longing,
The dream of a golden day;—
The murmur of passionate voices,
The exquisite perfume pressed
From the heart of the rose that nestled
In the beloved one's breast.

O wind, wild wind of winter!
What hast thou borne away?—
A burden of mournful remembrance,
The sigh of the year's decay;—
The skeleton leaves of the forest,
The drift from the chill snow-wreath,
And the prayer of a soul that is passing
Into the shadow of death.

UNDER THE SNOW.

Lie light, O gentle snow!
  Above the valleys green;
Beneath thy vesture let the flow'rets grow
  That may not yet be seen.

Soft wrapt in dreamless night
  They rest, and cannot tell
What eyes shall in their beauty take delight,
  What heart shall love them well.

O unblown flowers of love!
  The fated time abide,
The pale cold snow lies softly wreathed above,
  Your tender growth to hide.

But when the sun shall shine
  Each bud will blossom fair,
And flower with flower in fragrant beauty twine,
  For one alone to wear.

GLAMOUR.

THE breath of flowers was on the breeze,
And all the odours of the spring;
Amid the gently budding trees
We heard the throstle sing;
We watched the tender leaflets curled,
No green seemed half so gay before;
A hundred springs may deck the world,
But those green leaves no more—
No, never, never more.

The sun drank up the tears of night,
The happy tears of early dew;
Each drop became a globe of light
With golden green shot through.

We shook them off the primrose flowers,
No dew seemed half so bright before;
Now winter rain may fall in showers,
But those bright drops no more—
No, never, never more.

Within the blue, unblemished skies
The infant cloudlets cradled lay,
Like new-born souls in Paradise,
All clad in white array;
And in our happy eyes that met
There shone a light unknown before;
Now suns may rise, and suns may set,
But that love-light no more—
No, never, never more.

SLEEPING LOVE.

I WALKED among the pine-trees with my friend,
And all at once we came upon a place
Where Love lay sleeping with half-hidden face;
The parted branches let the light descend,
Fine, flickering rays amid his locks to blend,
But shadows veiled his limbs of perfect grace,
And clasped his body in a soft embrace,
As gentle dreams o'er restful spirits bend.
"His sleep is sweet," I said; "awake him not:"
Love turned his face in slumber as I spoke.
Then from my friend's encircling arm I broke,
And strove in new-born fear to flee the spot;
Yet on Love's face, too fair to be forgot,
I looked once more, and sighed. Then Love awoke.

DEAD LOVE.

I SAT among the pine-trees all alone;
And there, where living Love lay warm before,
The corpse of Love was lying, fair no more.
I heard the wind-vext branches creak and groan,
And cold rain drip upon the colder stone;
My ears grew weary of the far-off roar
Of waters, from the solitary shore
Drawn backwards, with a hoarse and sullen moan.
"Love sleeps," I said, "and will awake again,"
And on my lonely breast I laid his head,
And kissed his ashen lips that once were red,
And clasped and cherished him, but all in vain;
Henceforth for my delight or for my pain
Love never more shall wake, for Love is dead.

ROSE AND RUE.

It was the pleasant summer time,
When birds and flowers were blithe;
I slept amid the cool green grass,
Fresh from the mower's scythe;
And in a dream I saw my love,
So radiant and so fair,
She seemed a white and golden flower,
Born of the sunlit air.
The gentle breeze that kissed her brow
And stirred her locks of light,
Bore all the music of the past
Upon its pinions bright.
She smiled on me a strange, sweet smile,
And soft, low words she said,
And in my breast she laid a rose
That glowed with heavenly red.

I wakened in the fragrant field,
Soft fell the purple eve,
But in my heart I felt the pain
That dreams of rapture leave.
The summer woods seemed bare and brown,
And cold the breath of June,
And harshly fell upon my ear
The blackbird's dulcet tune;
The lovely light of dreams was gone;
The breeze that wandered by
Bore sadly on its weary wings
The echo of a sigh.
I sought the crimson rose she gave,
All pearled with odorous dew;—
But in my breast I only found
A spray of withered rue.

WANDERING WISHES.

Oh, that I were a ripple on the stream
That glides and murmurs past thy garden bower!
Among the ferns and mosses I would gleam,
And leave a jewel on each gentle flower;
And thou shouldst see them look so fresh and fair
That thy dear eyes would love to linger there.

Oh, that I were a rose-leaf on the gale,
The happy southern gale that flies to thee!
Upon its viewless pinions I would sail,
And haunt thee like a summer memory,
And bring thee roseate odours, faint and sweet,
And fan thy brow, and flutter to thy feet.

Oh, that I were the echo of a song,
A soft and tender song of endless love!
And I would come, when evening shadows throng,
And none behold thee save the stars above,
And through thy dreamful fancy I would glide,
And creep into thy heart, and there abide.

GLEAMS OF LIGHT.

More sweet than smiles are tears which rise unbidden
When some fair scene first dawns upon our eyes,
A gift of joy, by Nature long kept hidden,
That thrills us with the rapture of surprise.

But dearer yet and deeper is our feeling
When some fair deed by one we love is wrought,
Some unexpected grace of soul revealing,
The lovely blossom of some secret thought.

Oh! in those moments of divine emotion
The darkening veil of doubt is rent apart;
More near us seems the God of our devotion,
The heaven we hope for dwells within our heart.

FAITH IN DOUBT.

I SOUGHT to keep the way of life—'twas hard;
Beneath me yawned the darkness, wide and deep,
I saw the blinding mists around me sweep,
And spectral forms of fear the pathway barred,
My footsteps to bewilder and retard.
No help was left, save on my knees to creep
Close to the crumbling edge, and cling and weep,
With weary limbs, and hands all bruised and scarred.

For this, methought, was faith—with desperate trust
To grasp the worn-out relics of a creed:
Beneath the strain they shivered into dust.
I reeled and fell—oh, where?—upon the breast
Of Love divine, and there, at peace indeed,
My soul in heavenly darkness lies at rest.

DISCORDS UNRESOLVED.

SWEET dreams and mournful wakings; delights that close in anguish;
Soft-seeming loves that scorch thee, or chill like cruel frost;
Fair flowers of bitter fruitage; bright buds that pine and languish;
A maze of whirling discords, whereof the clue is lost;—

Of these, O restless spirit, thy life on earth is fashioned,
And darkness lies around thee, and hides thy further way,
And vainly rise unceasing to Heav'n thy cries impassioned,
Brief storm-gleams mock thy fancy with hopes of dawning day.

* * * * * *

O soul, be strong, strive upwards;—in the ethereal distance,
Somewhere, oh! surely somewhere, the light eternal glows;
Unwind the tangled music, by patience and persistence
Thou shalt find the perfect concord, the long-forgotten close.

* * * * * *

I strive! my soul strives upwards, till strength and courage fail me
In the fervour of my straining to the light that shines afar;—
I sink; the darkness deepens, and stormy doubts assail me
Lest I seek a thing that is not—the phantom of a star.

The earth's delights are surer: though tears may follow laughter,
The brief, bright bubbles sparkle ere their light in dust expires;
The draught is rich in sweetness though the wormwood taste come after,
And peace is for the spirit that strives not nor aspires.

Vain hope! for thus peace comes not; the spirit's restless pinions
Still ache to bear it upwards to the region of its dreams,
To the glory and the wonder of those mystical dominions
Whence truth and love and beauty flow forth in ceaseless streams.

I strive! I rise yet higher! I almost catch the voices,
The harmonies unfolding of the hidden sacred song;
My spirit strives in anguish; it trembles and rejoices
To see the faint, far radiance that may be light ere long.

Oh, fiery pain! oh, rapture! my soul and body rending!
The chains are burst that bound me to silence and to night;
Oh, the discords! oh, the shadows into glorious beauty blending!
I hear, I hear the music; I see, I see the light!

* * * * * *

Gone! with a cry of triumph; and we, who cannot follow,
Left with the cast-off body that hath not speech nor breath,
Ask vainly if that rapture be but a mockery hollow,
A fever-born illusion that haunts the brain ere death.

Was it truth, that beauteous vision? were they real, those
tones angelic?
Doth such welcome wake the spirit to a nobler life
divine?
None knoweth; of that glory remains to us no relic,
Save the smile that on the features of the dead is wont
to shine.

ROSEBUD AND RAGWEED.

A LITTLE girl, with eyes
As clear as morning skies,
And cheeks of softest rose, and locks of gold,
Went bounding forth to play
One happy summer day,
The joyous day when she was six years old.

She came of noble race,
Her blooming baby face
The youngest bud upon an ancient tree;
So, reared with tenderest care
And guarded everywhere,
Close-watched by Argus eyes of love was she.

With mirthful thoughts elate,
She could not keep sedate
Her dancing limbs, alive with merriment;
Swift as a roe, she flew
Down the long avenue
Where tall horse-chestnuts shed abroad their scent.

Then, forth into the park,
All chequered light and dark
By changeful shades of mighty forest trees;
The town below it lay,
Where smoke made dim the day,
And want and drudgery served wealth and ease.

Oh, what a world of light
The sunbeams broad and bright
Pour forth upon the boughs of ash and oak!
Oh, what a world of gloom
The lurid fires illume,
Where yonder town lies smothered in its smoke!

The little maiden ran,
As youthful creatures can
When neither care nor weariness they know,

And after her there came
A grave attendant dame
Mature of age, with measured steps and slow.

Again and yet again
She cried, but all in vain,
"Walk slower; stay beside me, Rosalind!"
Ever more far and fleet
The little lightsome feet
Flew gaily onward, heedless as the wind.

How sweet is liberty,
Since even to be free
From fetters linked by love is sometimes good!
The little wilful maid,
With conscience half afraid,
Rejoiced in her unwonted solitude.

Full well the haunts she knew
Where tufted cowslips grew,
Like golden brooches dropped upon the sward;
Above the flowers she bent,
A busy bee, intent
On gathering up a honey-fragrant hoard.

She filled her lap with flowers,
Until in golden showers
They fell, and overflowed her lifted skirt;
Then, sitting on the ground,
The stems together bound
With tiny fingers, weak and inexpert.

Soon, tired with fruitless toil,
She flung away her spoil,
And, looking up, she started with surprise,
For lo! another child,
Ragged, unkempt, and wild,
Stood watching her with keen and curious eyes.

A little child, and thin,
With yellow, sickly skin,
So pinched and wan, her age were hard to guess;
Through her torn petticoat
The searching sunbeams smote
Frail, puny limbs, unwashed and stockingless.

The children gazed and gazed
With shining eyes amazed,
Eyes bold and black, eyes innocent and blue;

All unabashed they seek,
As plain as eyes can speak,
An answer to the question, Who are you?

But, as the moments passed,
Sweet Rosalind at last
Grew half-familiar through this mute discourse,
And brightly blushed, and smiled
Upon the ragged child,
Though shyness checked her laughter at its source.

The child of graver mood
In watchful silence stood,
While round her bare brown feet the blossoms lay,
Till Rosalind, grown bold,
Picked up her scattered gold,
And murmured shyly, "Won't you come and play?"

The other child drew near,
But slowly, half in fear,
And sat by Rosalind upon the grass;
The sun shone mildly down
On golden head and brown,
Fair cheek and dusky felt the soft air pass:

Beneath the shady tree
Those children seemed to be
Two diverse flowers that chance had planted there,
Which grew in strange accord
Upon the summer sward,
A starveling ragweed, and a rosebud fair.

Then Rosalind, with eyes
Still widened by surprise,
Said, "Tell what is your name, and where your home?"
And, now no more afraid,
The other answer made,
"My name is Nell, and from the town I come."

To the dim city's smoke
She pointed as she spoke.
"My mother lives," she said, "in Dragon Lane,
But she got drunk to-day
And so I ran away——"
She paused, and drew her breath like one in pain.

But soon she raised her head,
And, looking round her, said,
"I never saw a field like this before,

So large and green and bright;
The day seems twice as light
As in the town, the sun shines so much more.

"I like to rest my feet,
So tired from the street,
On this soft grass. I wish that I were you
To see the flowers and trees
As often as you please,
And not feel hot and hungry as I do."

"But are you hungry now?"
Asked Rosalind, her brow
Clouded with pity. "I'm too tired to eat
Just now," said little Nell.
"Last night I wasn't well,
I couldn't sleep in all the noise and heat.

"Besides, I went to bed
Without a crust of bread,
For mother dances at the music-hall;
She sleeps through half the day,
And often stops away
All night, and leaves me with no food at all."

Her voice was thick and hoarse,
Her accent broad and coarse;
She talked of things to Rosalind unknown;
Haggard and wild and weird
Her glittering eyes appeared,
Amid the tangled locks across them blown.

A flickering fever-streak
Burned on her hollow cheek,
Where ghastly pallor strove with hectic red;
And, as she flushed and paled,
"My head!" she feebly wailed,
"A dreadful burning pain is in my head!"

She shivered as she spoke,
And on her brow outbroke
Cold drops, and all her face was drawn with pain;
Her wild black eyes shone bright
With strange and fitful light,
Like signal-fires upon a stormy main.

Help, help they mutely craved:
Alas! unhelped, unsaved,
She needs must battle with the sea of death;

For fever thrilled her frame
With gusts of ice and flame,
And racked her limbs, and caught her labouring breath.

And Rosalind looked on
With anxious eyes that shone
All moist and radiant with a gathering tear;
By all she saw and heard
Her childish heart was stirred
With gentle pity, and with wondering fear.

At last she murmured low,
"Perhaps we ought to go
And tell your mother that you are not well."
"My mother!" with that name
In mocking accents came
The shrill, unchildlike laugh of little Nell.

A mother, to her ear,
Meant memories of fear,
And cruel blows by cruel words made worse;
It meant a hardened heart
Where pity had no part,
Which deemed a child a burden and a curse.

"I'm better now," she said,
"Except my aching head;
Perhaps I've got the fever and shall die
Like Bessie. She had hair
Wavy like yours, and fair;
We often played together, she and I."

Approaching as she spoke,
She stretched her hand to stroke
Bright Rosalind's fair dress, all dainty clean;
A little smear of dirt
Upon the snowy skirt
Was left by her poor fingers, brown and lean.

"I'm glad I came to-day,"
She said. "I ran away
Clear out of mother's reach, and in the road
I saw a cart piled high
With hay, and standing by
Old Jacob's donkey, nibbling at the load.

"Among the hay I crept,
And there I hid, and slept
I cannot tell how long; but when at last

I woke, the cart had gone
Beyond the town, and on
It jolted, and through country fields it passed.

"I saw the tall green trees,
For, scrambling to my knees,
I made a little window in the hay;
But when your gate shut tight,
It gave me such a fright
I clambered down, and softly crept away.

"But oh! if I could stay
Here on the grass all day,
And smell the flowers and feel the pleasant air,
I'd soon get well, I think;
I'd crawl away and drink
The water sparkling through the bushes there.

"Close to the edge I'd creep,
And drink, and go to sleep,
A long, long sleep, then wake and drink again;
I'd dream a happy dream
Beside that shining stream,
And when I woke I shouldn't feel the pain.

"But in our lane, you know,
No yellow flowers grow,
And no green grass upon the dusty ground;
The water in our well
Is bad to taste and smell,
Not like your stream that makes a pretty sound."

"Oh! what a dreadful place!"
Said Rosebud, and her face
Grew pale; "how dull and ugly it must be!
I wish that you might come
And see me in my home,
And run about the park, and play with me."

Nell gave a wistful look,
Then sighed, and sadly shook
Her head: "No, that I'm sure would never do;
For I'm so black and rough,
Not clean or neat enough
To be fit company for such as you.

"I must go back again,
Back to the noisy lane,
Where drunken people fight, and children steal;

Though I should like far best
To lie down here and rest,
So sick and sore and tired as I feel!"

In Rosalind's blue eyes
The tears began to rise
To hear her new-found friend so sadly speak;
By love and pity swayed,
Her little arms she laid
Round Nell's brown neck, and kissed her burning cheek.

The kiss was scarce impressed
When each, with beating breast,
Heard hasty footsteps 'mid the rustling grass,
And, through a wavy screen
Of woven branches green,
They saw a gleam of silken garments pass.

Up started Nell and fled.
Through bush and bramble sped
Her feeble feet, by terror winged for flight;
Her tangled dusky hair
Streamed wildly on the air,
And then among the trees was lost to sight.

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Within a narrow room,
Made loathsome by the fume
Of all foul things decaying in the street,
Till Heaven's own blessèd air
Was changed to poison there,
And death was gendered by sweet summer's heat,

A fever-stricken child,
With bloodshot eyes and wild,
With scarlet cheeks and tangled locks astray,
Hard straw beneath her head,
Old rags above her spread,
Lay moaning all the long and weary day.

No mother's face bent near,
No mother's loving tear
Fell gently on her parched and burning skin;
Her mother's eye was bright
With red and evil light,
Lit by the fires of soul-destroying gin.

The child lay all alone,
And moaned her weary moan,
And tossed upon her hard, unrestful bed,

Seeking, but all in vain,
A moment's ease from pain,
Or some cool spot whereon to rest her head.

None heard her feeble cry;
"My throat is hot and dry,
Oh! for a drink of water from the stream—
There's poison in our well!"
Alas! for little Nell,
Half waking from her troubled fever-dream,

None answered to her call.
She saw the blackened wall,
The dull, disordered room, the hearth unswept,
And still she rambled on,
"How bright the water shone
Which through the grass, and past the bushes crept!

"So soft beneath my feet,
So green and cool and sweet,
That great field was, it almost made me cry;
And everywhere about
Some little flower peeped out,
And watched me with its pretty yellow eye.

"Far up above my head
The leaves were thickly spread,
The birds were fluttering from bough to bough;
Oh! if I were but laid
Under that quiet shade
With all those happy sights around me now!

"I'm black and rough, I know,
Not clean enough to go
Among the flowers, unless I'm tidied first;
But in the stream I'd lie,
And feel it flowing by
To wash me white, and quench this dreadful thirst."

She dozed again, and lay
Quite still. A pallid ray
Of fading light illumed the dying child.
At last, she slowly raised
Her languid lids, and gazed
With dark and dreamful eyes, no longer wild.

What could they gaze upon,
Those eyes that strangely shone
Like flickering lamps in twilight's ghostly gloom?

Watched they the sick flies crawl
Along the mouldering wall,
Where soot-wreathed cobwebs spanned the squalid room?

Nay; but her fevered dreams
Of sunlit summer streams,
And grassy fields where flowers were blooming fair,
Before her longing eyes
As visions seemed to rise,
Which filled with loveliness the empty air.

"The sky so bright and blue,
The shady trees that grew
So high, I see them all!" she said. "I see
A garden green and gay,
Where many children play,
Just like the little girl who played with me.

"They laugh and leap and run,
And brightly in the sun
Shine their white dresses and their yellow hair;
'Come, Nell!' I hear them call,
'Come up amongst us all;'—
I wonder if that little girl is there!"

Her voice grew faint, and ceased.
Her infant soul released
Flew up to God. The night came on apace;
And there was none to close
The eyelids, and compose
The dark entangled tresses round the face.

While Nell lay white and still,
Rigid in death's last chill,
Pillowed on rags, with rags to cover her;
Another childish head
Lay in a curtained bed
'Mid snowy linen, sweet with lavender.

Bright Rosalind! must this
Repay thy gentle kiss—
This heavy languor, and this hot unrest?
What gift of pain and woe
Did that wan cheek bestow,
That cheek thy little lips in pity pressed?

Oh! recompense unkind
It seemed; yet haply blind
Are we; and, through the lovely morn to live
And die ere toilsome noon,
May be the sweetest boon
All-seeing Love to sinless souls can give.

Soft faces, pale with love,
Flitted like dreams above
The child's white bed, and gentle hands were near,
And lightly falling feet,
And voices low and sweet
Which breathed love's broken music in her ear.

Cool grapes were by her side,
Fresh gathered, purple-dyed,
And peaches, crimson where the light had lain;
The air that came and went
Was sweetened by the scent
Of roses, nodding at her window-pane.

But nothing fair or bright
Could give the child delight,
To her sick senses outward scenes were dim;

Her spirit's weary wing
Went sadly wandering
Through endless streets, unlovely, dark and grim.

"No air," she sighed, "no air,
No sunshine anywhere!
Long dusty lanes, and houses in a row—
Black houses side by side;
The doors are opened wide,
And through the streets the ragged children go.

"How dark it is, and dull!
Why is the air so full
Of strange white faces, shining in the shade
Like faces in a glass?
And always, as they pass,
They look at me, and make me feel afraid!"

"My Rosebud! I am near:
I hold you, have no fear,"
The mournful mother said, and closer clasped
Her darling to her breast;
But still, in wild unrest,
The child with pain and terror moaned and gasped.

Out of her soul's despair
The mother's silent prayer
Was rising up continually to God:
The air was strangely stilled,
As if its void were filled
By some mysterious influence shed abroad.

Then Rosalind's blue eyes
Grew soft as evening skies,
Her cheek with fever was more faintly flushed,
And with a gentler swell
Her breast arose and fell,
Like troubled waters when the winds are hushed.

Thus, all the summer day
And all night long, she lay
As in a dreamless trance more soft than sleep,
Until the birds awoke,
And through the darkness broke
The dawn, and up the sky began to creep.

So gently came her breath
Her slumber seemed like death;
But still her little tender hand was warm,

When, like a splendid ray
Of Heaven's eternal day,
The earliest sunbeam kissed her tranquil form.

E'en at its touch, her eyes
Unclosed, and glad surprise
Shone in their depths, and, rising in her bed,
She pointed to the light;
"See, mother, see how bright
And beautiful it is in Heaven!" she said.

Then, like an April rose
'Mid winter's lingering snows,
Her sweet pale face upon the pillow fell;
And, with a happy smile
Upon her lips the while,
She murmured low, "I'm coming, little Nell!"

Now years have come and gone,
And all around the stone
Which marks where Rosebud sleeps, bright blossoms wave;
But nettles flourish rank
About the churchyard dank
Where Ragweed lies in her neglected grave.

DARKNESS BEFORE DAWN.

A LONDON REVERIE.

THE night is softer than the sound of singing,
When distant voices chant a solemn strain;
Pale opal vapours round the moon are clinging,
But in the depths of heaven the stars are plain.

Far, far away from here the wood reposes,
And, robed in moonlit green and shimmering grey,
A weird, capricious loveliness discloses,
Undreamt of by the denizens of day.

Lone on some wave-tormented promontory,
Perchance the lighthouse watcher's gaze may be
Fixed on the long and rippled line of glory
That lies across the solitary sea.

But here, where day by day the crowd grows thicker,
And breath and dust and smoke obscure the skies,
We see reflections of the gas-lamps flicker,
Instead of starlight, in each other's eyes.

In vain the marvels of the night allure us,
We have not time, nor heart, nor brain to spare
To watch the rising splendour of Arcturus,
Or count the gems in Berenice's hair.

The crowd constrains us with a mightier magic
That bids us own our throbbing hearts akin
To all this teeming life, grotesque or tragic,
To all its pathos, and to all its sin.

Through the dim streets they swarm, the motley masses,
Who never met till now—may meet no more;
Yet, 'mid the rest, some stranger-face that passes
May half reveal a world unknown before.

They pass and pass; bright youths, alert and eager
To seek and seize the best that life can give;
And toil-worn men and women, grey and meagre,
Whose work has hardly left them time to live.

A lovely girl, her home's best-guarded jewel,
Goes smiling to her carriage, passing by
One scarce less fair, to whom the Fates are cruel,
Who fears to live, yet hardly dares to die.

Sleek loungers, 'mid the crowded path delaying,
Give place to one who passes, scant of breath,—
A watcher of the sick, a call obeying
To soothe the anguish of a bed of death.

They pass; some rich in youth and flushed with pleasure,
Yet fain to speed the laggard feet of time;
Some who have tasted joy in scanty measure,
Yet fear the echo of their death-bells' chime.

And 'mid the throng gleam out those poor, fair faces—
Wan flowers, once fresh, by city waysides cast—
Whose cheeks are yet too young to bear the traces
That sordid thoughts shall sear them with at last.

Oh! surely yet some sweetness worth the winning
Is left them; if their hearts were truly seen,
They were not yet so deeply stained with sinning
But tears of generous love might wash them clean.

So frail, so hardly pressed! what dim suggestion
Of baby brows sin-branded from their birth
Comes to our thoughts, and haunts us with the question—
"What then is calm, fair-seeming goodness worth?"

Amid the crash of turbulent existence,
Amid the groans of wounded life down-trod,
One cry is heard, with terrible persistence
For ever ringing in the ears of God:—

Why are these mournful multitudes created,
Whose birthright is despair, whose hope is death?—
Why are our brothers and our sisters fated
To feed on evil from their earliest breath?

'Tis the old question, and there comes no answer,
No help from any heavenly dwelling-place;
And yet more widely spreads the cureless cancer
That taints the life-blood of our wretched race.

Deep is the gulf wherein our brethren languish,
And we, who see the light in fitful gleams,
Dare not behold the horror of their anguish,
Lest it should darken all our hopeful dreams.

We veil our faces, turn aside, dissemble,
Build dainty bridges o'er the seething pit;
Yet now and then the upper earth will tremble,
When some fierce cry arises out of it.

Ah! then we hasten to invent devices
To drive the brood of demons from their nest,
And sweeten with our essences and spices
The fumes wherewith our nostrils are opprest.

Still standing on our vantage ground, we sprinkle
Pure holy water on the depths below,
Our consecrated silver bells we tinkle,
And set our sacred tapers in a row.

In vain! in vain! We scatter light and sweetness,
Yet on the deepening gloom we gaze surprised;
For something in our efforts lacks completeness,
And Satan will not thus be exorcised.

Shuddering we say, with heart and courage failing:
This is the open mouth of hell on earth;—
We hear the ceaseless weeping and the wailing,
The gnashing teeth of rage and horrid mirth.

And, dreading lest those sounds of fear betoken
For wrong and woe an endless victory,
We ask, amid tumultuous thoughts unspoken,
"Is there a God, since things like these can be?"

"There is!" reply those pioneers undaunted,
Who, fearing not the blackness of the porch,
Have dared to search the gulf with horror haunted;
The flaming zeal of love their only torch.

The bravest and the strongest are the calmest;
They, smiling at our cries of weak despair,
Reiterate the saying of the Psalmist,
And, going down to hell, have found God there.

God; not 'mid cloven clouds and pealing thunders,
Nor trailing light the outward heavens to span;
But deep within that wonder of all wonders,
The sanctuary of the heart of man.

Choke up the temple-gate with dust and ashes,
With all pollution make the windows dark;
Yet, through some unexpected crevice, flashes
The feeble glimmer of the deathless spark.

As springs lie hidden in their secret chamber
Still lacking force to burst the rock's control;
As power electric sleeps within the amber,
So lies the life of God within the soul.

In the dark spirits of our hapless brothers
Faint gleams are kindled from the central sun,
The same warm light that makes the joy of others,
For fire and life and love and God are one.

This is our answer, this our hope of healing,
The lovely truth that Love incarnate tells;
No far-off, cloud-encompassed God revealing,
But Him who in the human spirit dwells.

For thus no soul is separate and single,
But each is of the Life Divine a part;
In flames of sacred love they meet and mingle,
And feel the throbbing of the Central Heart.

Ah! never may that heavenly fire be kindled
To purge and cheer the dwellers in the dark,
While in each narrow soul the light has dwindled
To an imprisoned, self-revolving spark.

It faints and pales in joyless isolation,
  Kept down and fettered from its free desire
To renovate in endless generation
  The fire-enkindled, fire-enkindling fire.

Let the glad flame burst forth in radiant splendour,
  And spread from soul to soul its waves of light!
Love shall reveal life's secret, love shall render
  The foul and dark abysses clear and bright.

For, by the light of love, we learn with wonder
  The lesson that the wrongs of ages teach
To men, by selfish contests rent asunder;—
  The good of all must be the good of each.

Yea, surely for the loveless past we suffer,
  The burden of an ancient curse we bear,
And roads for harmless feet are rendered rougher
  By stones that perished hands have scattered there.

Your graves are green, luxurious transgressors,
  Yet, through your crimes, our children sin and die;
We groan beneath the yoke of dead oppressors,
  And bear the stripes of tyrannies gone by.

And, in our present, lies the future folded;
Ours is the fate of man, to make or mar;
Oh! thought of joy and fear; by us are moulded
Lives yet to be, in centuries afar.

Day after day, in action or quiescence,
The offspring of our weakness or our strength,
Fly forth the thoughts, born of our spirits' essence,
To germinate in other lives at length.

And thus each spirit to all spirits cleaveth,
Life-threads that meet and part and meet again,
To form one web which God for ever weaveth,
The use whereof is not as yet made plain;

But thread by thread in wondrous dyes is steeping,
Crushed blood-red from the burning fruits of guilt,
Or washed to paleness in the founts of weeping,
Or bright with drops from rapture's rainbow spilt.

And each life-story, there depicted truly,
Amid the rest shall take its destined place;—
A touch of light or shade, completing duly
The lofty vision of the human race.

Therein the mighty sorrow of all ages,
The longing of all nations, is expressed;
The deep desire that no delight assuages,
The surging passion that can find no rest.

Long weeps the spirit of earth, as wept the maiden,
Love's bride, bereft of Love, and left forlorn,
Her weary limbs with shameful fetters laden,
Her drooping wings dust-soiled, untrimmed, and torn.

Yet hope is in the anguish of her passion,
And joy is in the wildness of her woes;
For, as she waxes pale and wan and ashen,
A stronger life within her throbs and grows.

Her old self dies; but re-awakens glorious
In her own offspring, beautiful and free,
For, from the heart of Death, shall rise victorious
The young and vigorous Life that is to be.

OLIVIA.

THE STORY OF A SINGER.

WHO hath not heard the melodies which float
From those dim regions, shadowy and remote,
Where linger phantoms of delights gone by?
There, voices that in silence seemed to die
Awake again and sing the songs of old;
There, perished loves rise from their ashes cold
And smile like living loves; and through the air
Is breathed the scent of flowers that once were fresh and fair.

There is a village 'mid the Apennines,
Deep-nestled in a valley; terraced vines
Grow on the sunlit slopes, and there outspread
The clustered plumes that deck the palm-tree's head,
The shimmering olive shakes its foliage light,
And the ripe orange glitters fiery bright

Amid its burnished leaves and ivory flowers;
But, chill and bare, above the woodland towers
The mountain-range, white-crowned with wintry snow
Or black against the summer sunset's glow.
In that fair valley lived a peasant child,
A child of sorrow, for no mother smiled
Upon her cradle; she was born of one
Whose woeful eyes were weary of the sun,
From whose cold lips she drew their latest breath
In the last kiss of love at strife with death.
But where her father wandered none could tell;
He was a strolling player, and full well
Could sing a joyous or a tender stave,
Roaming, as fancy led, from gay to grave
In ready rhyme; the flashes of his wit
Were clustered thick as fire-flies, when they flit
About the orange groves at close of day.
He came one springtide, and he went his way
Ere the first grapes had ripened; but he left
A gentle heart of all its joy bereft.
Yet the frail orphan found a love-warmed nest,
And softly slept upon a woman's breast
Beneath the shelter of a lowly roof;
And kindly hands toiled hard for her behoof,

And honest hearts, from selfish forecasts free,
Loved her for her dead mother's memory,
And, for sweet charity and pity true,
Gave the fond care to helpless creatures due.
The babe forlorn, the child of grief and wrong,
Had music for her dower; the love of song
Was born within her. Wrapt in still delight
She lay and listened when the waning night
Yielded to morning, and the skylark's lay
First led the choral song of opening day,
Till all the drowsy birds from bush and tree
Mingled their notes in full-voiced harmony,
And soon the happy herd-boy's carol shrill
Made answer from the pastures on the hill.
Her foster-mother's gentle lullabies
Woke a strange gladness in her wondering eyes;
With arms outstretched, she strove to reach the sound
Which in her baby heart an echo found.
And, older grown, amid a listening band
Of peasant children, with her small brown hand
Beating the time, she warbled sweet and true
The wild unwritten songs the village knew,
And in melodious changes soft or gay
From tune to tune her artless voice would stray.

Year after year, each peaceful as the last,
Slid by, and slowly dropped into the past;
And every season left its tender trace
In some new beauty on the maiden's face.
Like stars that one by one their light disclose,
The dawning thoughts within her soul arose,
And, rising, lit new radiance in her eyes,
Which shone with sudden gleams of glad surprise,
Then softly drooped, as if each shadowy lid
Some lovely secret in sweet darkness hid.
At last her voice, a nightingale full-grown,
From childish silvery shrillness changed its tone
To golden roundness, and her mellow notes,
Now soft as summer air that idly floats
'Mid full-blown flowers, yet makes no leaflet fall,
Now clear and ringing as a clarion call,
Breathed forth each light-winged fancy as it woke,
Till all her soul in changeful music spoke.

It was an April evening; soon to die,
The sun yet lingered, and the limpid sky
Faded to pearly paleness overhead,
But burned above the mountains, rosy red.

The glowing twilight brought a happy close
To a bright day of gladness and repose
And mirth that sped the flying hours along—
A festal day, a day of dance and song,
When all the village girls were wont to wear
Their best attire, with linen lily-fair
Drawn round the throat in many a graceful fold
Above the bodice, and a glimpse of gold
Perchance in hair or bosom. Thus arrayed,
With her young comrades went the orphan maid
In joyous converse, through the quiet wood.
At length beside a lofty pine they stood,
And on its age-scarred trunk the maiden leant.
The low, red sun between the branches sent
Upon her upturned face a fervid ray,
Which flushed it faintly, like the dawn of day
Beneath her midnight hair, and rested warm
Upon her snowy sleeve and soft brown arm.
Then, all at once, a rapture seemed to rise
In the deep darkness of her dreamful eyes;
A golden heart that lay upon her breast
Gleamed, as it rose and fell in swift unrest;
Then, clear and low, she tuned her voice to sing.
E'en as a bird first tries his quivering wing,

Slow-circling near the earth, and then takes flight
With sudden impulse, soaring to the light;
So first the pent-up music in her heart
Was breathed so gently from her lips apart
That the mild air scarce bore the notes along;
Then, all at once, leapt upwards, full and strong,
A rush of glorious sound, which cleft the air
Upborne on steadfast pinions fleet and fair,
Until it seemed to pass beyond the skies,
And, trembling, touch the verge of Paradise;
And then it sank, but not through weariness,
With long-drawn pauses, and with tender stress
Of sweet complaining in its lingering fall;
But when it ceased the woods were silent all,
And the first star shone tremulous on the night
As if the song had changed itself to light.
The listening village maidens stood around
The singer, till the last melodious sound
Had melted on the darkness; then they turned
With dewy eyes, to ask her whence she learned
Those lovely lays which none could sing but she,
Which were not like the village minstrelsy,
Yet made the hearers weep. She smiled and said,
"A song shall be my answer." Then she led

The maiden group along their homeward way
Amid the woodland shadows dim and grey,
And ever with her steps her voice kept time,
Blending soft music with a measured rhyme.

From my full heart outflow
The sweetest songs I know,
But first they have their birth
In heaven and in earth;
For all things bright and fair
With music fill the air—
Into my heart it floats,
My voice but echoes back the wandering notes.

The glory of the rose,
The lily's virgin snows,
The violet's dim attire,
The tulip's crown of fire,
All beauty, all delight
Enchanting sense or sight,
Is fraught with melody,
And all the earth seems musical to me.

When first the morning breaks
A song of joy awakes,
And when the noon is high
Glad anthems fill the sky,
The balmy evening falls
'Mid murmured madrigals,
And when the night is deep
Mysterious music lulls the world to sleep.

The tender buds of spring
Like linnets pipe and sing;
The rosy flowers of June
Are voices all in tune;
The joyful autumn's strain
Thrills through her golden grain;
The winter, chill and white,
Moans love-lorn lays through all the lingering night.

It could not be such golden gifts of song
Should dower a lonely mountain village long,
Nor such fair throat contain so rich a voice
Only to make the twilight woods rejoice,

And hold the simple souls of peasant-folk
In the sweet bondage of its gentle yoke.
It could not be; a rumour spread afar
That, 'mid the Tuscan Apennines, a star
Of purest light had dawned, and soon should rise
Full-orbed, to bless the world's enchanted eyes.
And one there was to whom this rumour brought
Strange memories, and half-remorseful thought
Of one beloved and wronged in by-gone years,
Whose dark reproachful eyes, with burning tears,
Mourned her lost peace and joy for ever gone;
And of the child he ne'er had looked upon,
Her child of sorrow, who should bear his name
Henceforth, and in whose promised future fame
His own should shine more fair. For now no more
He wandered, scant of coin, as heretofore;
The strolling singer, who in earlier times
Stood, cap in hand, and wove his ready rhymes
For gaping rustics in the market-place,
Now pleased the court, as then the populace,
And, thick as stars upon a summer night,
The diamonds on fair bosoms flashed delight
In swift pulsations, while his singing stirred
Soft longings in the souls of those who heard.

He sought and claimed his child: he found her fair,
Like, yet not like her mother, for her hair
Shaded a broader brow, and in her eyes
There shone a clearer light, which seemed to rise
From some pure flame that burned within her soul,
Some fervent longing for a far-off goal
As yet unknown, a hope half understood,
Fed by dim fancies. For the thing she would,
Her conscious thought had never yet expressed
Until the day she heard, with heaving breast,
Her new-found father's soft persuasive voice,
Which urged with glowing promises her choice
To live for music only. At that word
Her heart leapt upward, like a captive bird
Set free to breathe the fresh and fragrant scent
Of the free air, his native element.
To live for music only!—oh delight!
Her being's inmost chords were tuned aright
For that life and no other, and they thrilled
E'en at the thought, till all her soul was filled
With happy harmonies. Her father told
Of earthlier joys, of praise and fame and gold;
She heeded not, but murmured o'er and o'er,
"To live for music;" and she asked no more.

"Farewell, farewell," her foster-mother said,
Resting her hands in blessing on the head
Whose earliest pillow was her gentle breast.
"Ay, gold and fame are good, but not the best,"
She sighed, amid a tender rain of tears;
"God prosper thee through many joyful years,
Child of my heart; but whatsoe'er befall,
Remember, love and truth are best of all."

One summer evening, as the daylight paled,
The maiden looked on Florence, softly veiled
In floating folds of soft translucent mist,
Shot through with gold and rose and amethyst.
Into her soul that glowing radiance shone,
And like a dream of beauty lured her on,
Until, like one whom unknown joys await,
With throbbing heart, she passed the city gate.
Three years she dwelt upon the Arno's bank.
Her father held a favoured artist's rank.
In an art-loving city. He was rich
With the quick gains of one who can bewitch

The round bright coins to dance into his purse,
Tinkling in pleasant concord with the verse
Which flows, entangled in light melodies,
From his trained throat, with seeming careless ease.
Meanwhile she dwelt in studious solitude,
So that no tone untrained, no accent crude,
Might mar the sweetness of her song, when fame
Should bear afar her tuneful southern name,
Olivia, to be praised in many lands
With fervent voices and applauding hands.

Full many a summer night she watched the skies
Grow dark, and open all their starry eyes,
And the warm southern moon of softest glow
Make the pale marble shine like stainless snow,
And shed her tender light on dome and tower;
Till, in the hush of that enchanted hour,
The maiden felt the beauty that she saw
Enter her soul, and, by her being's law,
Express itself in music. Thus her song
Grew ever, day by day, more sweet and strong,
Fed by fair memories and visions bright,
As flowers grow lovely, fed by dew and light.

Her day of triumph came. Her soul set free
Flew forth upon the wings of melody;
Hers was the joy to let the music float
Upwards, or softly fall, nor fear one note
Should fail from perfect sweetness; hers to give
A voice to thoughts divine, and make them live,
And tell, in language lovelier than speech,
Their mystic message, which has power to reach
Our being's inmost shrine, where soul and sense
Are blended into one; and more intense
Became the life within her as she sang,
And in her voice a thrill of passion rang
Which drew forth all its sweetness, like a breeze
That trembles through the odorous orange-trees.

She loved all music purely beautiful;—
The stately measures of the ancient school,
In simple dignity of classic phrase;
The fitful fancies of more restless days
Which yearn in wailing discords, and prolong
The notes of doubt and sorrow, till the song
Goes sighing to its close; the strains that flow,
Fresh as the springs that taste of Alpine snow,

From rustic lips untaught, yet find their way,
In sweet pathetic changes, sad or gay,
To every gentle heart; all these she loved,
But not for gain or praises could be moved
To sing the trivial songs that catch the ear
But for the soul no subtle meaning bear,
For, by the instinct of her heart controlled,
She strove her gift divine of song to hold
For noblest uses only; to reveal
The mystery of beauty, and unseal
The founts of lofty passion; to awake
High aspirations in the souls that ache
For weariness of longings unfulfilled,
Till, in each pause of life, by music filled,
A cry of love should rise to realms afar
Where love and loveliness immortal are.

Fair was the noontide of her youthful fame,
Hers was no measured greeting calm and tame,
For all who saw her owned the blended grace,
The harmony of voice and form and face,
Which made it seem, in each impassioned part
She sang, as if the impulse of her heart

Throbbed through the tuneful phrases, and she chose
Song for her language, that she might disclose
Her inmost soul, in every varying strain
Touching the chords of rapture or of pain
More subtly than by any spoken word;
For all her thoughts were melodies unheard.

Olivia sang of love, yet never knew
The flavour of the honey and the rue
That mingle in love's cup; such souls as hers
By their own insight are interpreters
Of passion, though within them yet its power
Lies folded, as the fruit within the flower.
A dream of love, more beautiful than aught
That earth can yield, a dream to fancy taught
By lofty musings, through her tender lays
Shone, like the lovely light of vernal days.
Therefore, though many wooed her, none could win
The treasures of her heart; love crept not in
Amid the thoughts of music, which possessed
Alone the kingdom of her quiet breast.
Yet sometimes 'mid the passion of her song
A note of sadness seemed to pine and long

For joys unknown, as if her soul was stirred
By some deep wave of feeling, faintly heard
As in a sigh, amid the swelling sea
Of full and ever-flowing melody.

It is a thing to weep for, when the great,
The souls divinely born, are bound by fate
To serve the base. Olivia, in the pride
Of her young triumph, knew no other guide
Than Art; she sang the music that she loved,
The noblest, nor by praise or gold was moved
To lend her voice to strains of lower aim;
And in the flush and freshness of her fame
Her watchful father left her free, and smiled
To see her, like a winsome wilful child,
Please but the more for all her wilfulness.
But when the harvest of her gains grew less,
And newer voices caught the fickle ears
Of listening idlers, cold and selfish fears
Were wakened in his heart, and he became
His daughter's tyrant; for a quenchless flame

Withered each nobler impulse, and controlled
His soul's desires—a gambler's greed for gold.
Toil without rest was now Olivia's lot;
And ceaseless fretting cares, that ended not
With the day's labour, wore her life away;
For her the morning light was changed to grey
Long ere the evening fell. Alas! how blest
Are they who live and love and sink to rest
Ere the long weariness is yet begun
Of lingering years, when life and love are done.

Gold, gold, more gold, was still the gambler's cry;
And still his daughter laboured, though her eye
Had lost its starry light, and, week by week,
Her voice grew feebler. Yet she dared not seek
The rest she craved; her weary lot was toil
Without its joy, for now she must despoil
Herself of all the royal robes she wore,
And be as one of those who may not soar
To Art's high peaks with glory's light aglow,
But labour in the shadowed vales below.
No longer did melodious phrases twine
Round all her thoughts, and make her dreams divine;

New cares, unmusical and full of pain,
Came trooping through her worn and fevered brain;
Her life dragged on, by griefs and fears opprest;
The heart of music died within her breast.

It was a mournful thing to look upon
Her faded beauty. All the splendour gone
From brow and bearing, lowly and discrowned
She stood, and yet her queenly soul had found
Strength to endure; her face was strangely calm,
Though sad beyond all speech. The martyr's palm,
And not the laurel, now seemed meet for her;
Since all her triumphs of the days that were,
Lived but as snake-like memories, and stung
The crushed and bleeding heart to which they clung.
Pain's cruel circles darkened round her eyes,
Which shone, like meteors set in starless skies,
With weird yet splendid lustre; and her cheek
Was waxen white, save for a hectic streak
Above the hollows worn by wasting grief.
Yet she could smile. The heart may find relief

In tears that quicken sorrow as they flow,
But in that smile forlorn a buried woe
Looked forth ; the dead, cold, heavy woe, which clings
About the heart's root, poisoning the springs
Of youth and joy. Her smile was like her voice.
Lost were the tones that made the woods rejoice
And pealed among the mountains, till they rang
With rapture, and a hundred echoes sang ;
But the faint spectres of the songs which thrilled
The souls of multitudes, arose, and filled
Kind hearts with pity, as they feebly strained
Upward with trembling tones, which scarce attained
The height they sought, nor lingered there to swell
The closing phrase, but harsh and broken fell
In a brief cadence, poor and incomplete.
Yet, 'mid those mournful songs, how strangely sweet,
How wildly sad and sweet, some sudden tone
Among the jangled strings would seem to moan,
In softest sorrow music e'er expressed,
Over the wreck and ruin of the rest !
Men heard her now with cold and listless mien,
Remembering nought of that which once had been,
The beauty and the melody which dwelt
In those lost strains of hers, which once could melt

To rapture, like some rich ambrosial wine
That wrought in soul and sense. And now no sign
Was left of all the radiance passed away
From the pale mortal frame, which dull decay
Had worn and spoilt. She stood before them there
No longer famous, and no longer fair;
A foil to younger singers of their choice,
A faded woman, with a broken voice.

The long night comes, when daylight's sorrows cease.
Olivia's sunless evening closed in peace;—
The glorious morn, the noontide overcast,
The hours of storm, went by; the bitter blast
Grew mild ere nightfall, and the air was sweet
With dewy freshness, when her weary feet
Ended at last their mournful pilgrimage.
As a long-captive bird, whose open cage
Holds him no more, flies forth and finds his way
To the dear woods where first he saw the day,

So she, her years of toilsome bondage done,
Sought the soft valley where the Tuscan sun
First shed its blessing on her baby brow.
Death came and took her father. Lonely now,
Weak and outworn with grief, her steps she turned
To Italy, and all her spirit yearned
After her foster-mother, and the breast
Where first her orphan head was laid to rest.

Oh ! fair familiar scenes, beheld again
After long years of passion and of pain,
How strangely dear and beautiful ye seem,
Like a glad wakening from a direful dream !
Olivia, when she saw the ancient pines
Climb the rough ridges of the Apennines,
And the gaunt mountain forms her childhood knew,
Dark-outlined on the noontide's burning blue ;
And when mild wafts of forest fragrance came,
Bearing the breath of budding flowers, the same
As those which blossomed round her infant feet ;
And when the wild birds, hidden from the heat
Among the leaves, began to chirp and sing,—
It seemed to her that Time on backward wing

Had flown, and brought again some vanished day
When childhood's heaven of peace around her lay.

"My mother, oh! my mother; let me lie
Here, in your arms. Oft have I longed to die,
To sleep, and find forgetfulness of woe,
But here I feel such health and healing flow
Out of your heart of love whereon I rest
Into my own, that now not all unblest
Seems life, and I would live." With tender tears
Soft falling, spoke Olivia. All the years
Of good and evil which had passed away,
And brought her fame's fruition and decay,
Had held no comfort like the faithful love
Which now, with mother-soothings, gently strove
To fill the wanderer's heart with rest and peace,
The weary heart whose woes were soon to cease.

It was a mild and tearful autumn day;
All ivory-pale upon her couch she lay
In troubled slumber. At her feet there knelt
Her peasant mother, weeping, as she felt
The small uneven pulse that, hurrying, pressed
To end its race, impatient for its rest.

When the slow hours brought round the eventide,
Olivia stirred and spoke: "Alas!" she sighed,
"My voice has failed. No more for joy of song
I sing. This tedious part is all too long;
Both heart and voice are weary—let me go.
There is no help; I sing for gold—yet no,
I sing for duty, though my aching heart
Faints in my breast. It were no daughter's part
To let a father suffer that her pride
Might feel no hurt. Methinks my spirit died
Before my body sickened. Yet to-night
Comes a renewal of my lost delight;
'Tis strange; I feel no weakness and no pain.
Bring me the music; I can sing again.
Play the soft prelude to the lovely theme
I learnt last night—nay, hush, I do but dream;
I am at peace—at peace—my soul set free
Lies floating on a sea of melody;—
How beautiful, how rich and sweet and strong,
Flow the full waves of that mysterious song!
Ye wild and woeful discords of despair,
What were ye but the prelude, to prepare
My spirit to endure the glorious sound
Which rolls from sphere to sphere, and circles round

The throne of God?—No song is sung in vain,
But all earth's music swells the splendid strain
That fills the universe. How strangely dear
My songs of old would seem, if I could hear
Their echo; and they say no sound can die,
But vibrates evermore from sky to sky,
And circles on through space. If this be truth
Perchance the vanished music of my youth
Is not all lost, but, echoing onwards still,
Some listening spirit with delight may fill
Long ages hence." She ceased, and lay awhile
In silence, and the shadow of a smile
Played round her mouth. But soon she moved again,
And moaned, like one in sorrow or in pain,
And murmured mournfully, "My fault was pride;
I scorned the humble toilers at my side,
Who sang for daily bread. I thought that Art
Should be a mystic worship, set apart
For chosen souls; and, though my thought was true,
Yet loving human hearts make music too,
Though gain, not beauty, be their daily care,
While by their toil they render life more fair
For those they love. A holier place was mine
Methought, as priestess in the secret shrine

Of Art, for high and mystic service sealed;
Since, by my voice, I hoped should be revealed
Some heavenly message. But the temple door
Was closed, and shut me out for evermore;
And so, of pride came weakness and disgrace,
And, mournfully, I took the lowest place
Among the throng who crowd the outer court.
Alas! my days of joy were few and short,
Long is my penance. Music pines and cries
Within me, like the voiceless love that lies
Imprisoned in my worn and weary breast,
Love unbestowed, and music unexpressed.
O music! my delight and my despair!
How dost thou torture me! Alas! I bear
The fire divine that daring mortals stole
From heaven's own glory, in my struggling soul;
It burns, it strives;—would that its fervid flame
Might utterly consume this feeble frame,
And force its way to freedom! Oh! how long
Must this endure? Ye fettered wings of song,
Burst, burst the bonds of flesh that hold you fast,
For this keen flame must burn them through at last!"

The gentle breeze that stirred the evening air
Wafted to heaven the weeping voice of prayer;
The prayer that rose from a fond heart and true,
The prayer of faith; and, like a healing dew,
Came peace and stillness to the striving soul
Escaping from the worn-out frame's control.
Her broken murmurs, pitiful and wild,
Sank into silence; and she softly smiled
On the kind eyes that watched her. Then she took
The rough brown hand in hers, and with a look
Of happy calm, she laid it on her breast.
"Yes; love is best," she murmured, "love is best;
Love is God's music." As she spoke, the clouds,
Which all day long had hung like white wet shrouds
Across the heavenly blue, asunder rolled,
And the great setting sun with flames of gold
Scattered the earth-born mists, and o'er them shed
A splendid halo of celestial red.
And on Olivia's face a radiance gleamed,
And o'er her snowy dress a glory streamed,
And in her folded fingers, wan and white,
Shone the faint life-blood, warm with rosy light.
The pain-lines on her brow were smoothed to rest,
More gently rose and fell her panting breast,

And round her pale, sweet, parted lips a smile
Crept softly. Thus she lay a little while,
Breathing the sunshine. Then, she raised her head
And sat up straight, and both her arms outspread
As if in welcome of some friend most dear;
And with wide-opened eyes, divinely clear,
She gazed, like one who listens. Low she spoke,
But in her voice the tender tones awoke,
The long-lost, lovely tones of happier days.
"I hear the song; the sacred song of praise;
The happy birth-song of a soul set free.
It is for me!—glad spirits sing for me!
A beautiful, innumerable throng
Pour out their being in a mighty song.
The blended voices rise; they swell; 'Rejoice!'
They cry; 'a soul is born!' But yet one voice,
One voice is wanting in that choir divine
To fill the perfect harmony. 'Tis mine!
They call me; hark! they call me. I am here,
Spirits of music! Nay; I feel no fear.
My voice shall no more falter and grow dumb;
My soul flies forth in music. Lo! I come!"

Ah! whither, whither goes
The spirit of the rose,
So sweet and fair when first her buds unclose?
Now, dead since yesterday,
She lies, in dim decay,
Her pallid petals strew the common way.

Ah! where shall live again
That rich, melodious strain,
Which, dying, made the silence seem like pain?
In what far-distant spheres,
After long lapse of years,
Shall its faint echoes reach immortal ears?

Say; to what realm of light
Did deathless Love take flight
While his lorn bride lay weeping in the night?
Sad Psyche! on what shore,
With amaranths strewn o'er,
Shalt thou embrace thy lord for evermore?

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